

February 24, 2021

Dear colleagues on CCAM,

I'm writing to provide an update on the English department's response to the External Unit Review that was completed on June 1, 2019. We have made substantial progress towards several of the many goals articulated by that document. However, much of the span of the last 12-15 months—the months accounted for by this letter—has been taken up by the challenge, naturally unanticipated by the Unit Review, of adapting to pandemic conditions. As well, 3 of our 10 permanent faculty members were on sabbatical this year, members who are among the department's most senior. My current headship is only a one-year term as it abuts my own sabbatical leave, and so the current headship is in some ways functionally, if not nominally, an acting headship. Some of these factors have slowed down our overall progress towards meeting the goals of the Unit Review, and particularly its curricular goals, but we have made concrete progress in some areas and will be pleased to renew our efforts on other fronts in the post-pandemic future we all hope for.

Mission and Branding:

1. The Unit Review suggested that the department should consider renaming itself the Department of English and Creative Writing in order to draw to the fore the success of the Creative Writing Program. This goal would entail a consequent revision of the website and of the department's promotional materials. The department has discussed this re-naming prospect and generally regards it favourably. However, my predecessor wisely suggested that this renaming would better take place in tandem with, and not separately from, the curricular overhaul that the report also calls for. In terms of the implicit goal of making the Creative Writing concentration and M.A. more central to the department's identity, however, I can report that the creative writing committee, with the help of Kara Vincent, did productively renew the website so as to create a detailed, new page for Creative Writing:
<https://www.uregina.ca/arts/english/programs/grad-programs/creative-writing.html>
2. The Review suggests that the department "should develop a profile in the literature of marginalized voices." The department has discussed this suggestion. However, those fields that the Review names as contributory or potentially contributory to that profile—Indigenous literature, Holocaust literature, prison writing, trans and queer literature—are distinct fields, not an aggregate field to be understood as "marginalized voices." The department is concerned that the term "marginalized voices" not only conflates and homogenizes these fields, but maintains an unjust hegemony, implying a "centre" to which these literatures are "marginal." Therefore, the department is not pursuing this suggestion when it comes to self-branding or self-description.

3. The report suggests that the department should articulate its mission/vision “in a positive move [mode?] rather than an embattled one.” The department has been profoundly affected by the halving of its faculty complement in the last 10 years, and made plain to the Unit Review Team the number of struggles it faces as a result of those cuts. However, since the department obviously does not self-present as “embattled” in any sort of public-facing way, we are completely unsure as to what this particular recommendation actually entails. It might be worth saying that in the beginnings of our curriculum review when we were articulating mission/vision to an external consultant in Winter 2020, we gave a good bit of thought to our own ideals in a way that the External Review might consider positive envisioning: what sorts of things we are doing well and what will help us build a stronger program; what we want to achieve through our reimagining of the curriculum; what we want an English graduate to have experienced, read and thought about.
4. The review suggests that the Faculty of Arts be able to articulate how English fits within its own and the university’s Strategic Vision. This is a suggestion for the Faculty, and not the department. My sense is that such discussions may be in a sort of temporary limbo while the university adjusts to pandemic conditions.

Development, Student Recruitment and the Arts@Work Program

5. The Faculty should invest in alumni-tracking software to share with departments, suggests the report. This hasn’t so far been done and it’s a good idea. The review notes the particularly strong relationship the department enjoys with its alumni. The department presently relies on the quality of the relationships between faculty members and former students to keep track of what alumni are presently up to. In this regard, we also make good use of the departmental facebook page, which regularly features (and invites) alumni news. A systematic way of tracking alumni would be very much appreciated, as the department makes frequent use of alumni in its recruiting events, its proseminar professional development series, its keynotes and roundtables. In a program like English, a program that doesn’t set students vocationally upon one clear path but rather upon many, the palpable presence of alumni in departmental events helps illustrate to undergraduate students the range of things that can be done with an English degree, helping crucially with recruitment and retention. Alumni help us show the forms of success that our present and future students can enjoy.
6. The department should start its own recruitment drive in collaboration with the faculty, drawing on alumni relationships. This is a worthy project, but with several large projects on hold in this survival year, including most centrally, curriculum, this will be a goal for future years.
7. The Faculty of Arts should return a significant portion of the payment received for online instruction to the department, for recruitment activities and seed funds for research (in the form of student assistantships). My predecessor notes, “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. The department should expand online offerings with a view to recruitment, community access to higher education and potentially an online certificate in creative writing. The entire

department—the entire university—has gained experience teaching remotely. It remains to be seen whether this temporary remote-delivery situation will lead to an expanded roster of online offerings: this will depend on departmental discussion of whether, practically and philosophically, we would like to do more online, and this discussion hasn't happened yet. However, the recommendation that we pursue a certificate in creative writing is one that the department accepts and is actively working on. A meeting between the creative writing contingent and CCE is scheduled for March 10th, and that discussion will draw on groundwork laid in previous years. This certificate may be partly rather than wholly online, as only one creative writing instructor presently has expertise in online (not remote-delivered) creative writing instruction. We do currently offer ENGL 152 and ENGL 252 online. The sole department member who offers these online courses is under consideration for a tenure-track conversion from an LTA, but the feasibility of a wholly or partially online certificate in creative writing may substantially depend on that colleague's permanency in the department.

9. English should work with the Arts@Work Initiative to give students internship credit for community events, conference organization and possibly involvement with the proseminar series. My predecessor notes: "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. The Faculty of Arts should support the professionalization series, possibly from online communications revenue, and possibly with a student intern from Arts@Work. This is a recommendation for the Faculty, not the department, but it is a good idea. The proseminar series – on hold this year – is a very large responsibility for the organizer, though the whole department contributes in the form of talks. Support in the form of a student intern would both help with this coordination of this series and would provide excellent experience for the student. The proseminar series – highly lauded by the Unit Review—was put on hold before the onset of the pandemic for lack of resources. My predecessor notes that the English Students' Association was intending to take over that project. However, the ESA has not been able to do this work under the current circumstances.

Academic Staff: Sessionals and Teaching Assistants

11. The department should review its use of TAs, suggests the report. The department has, in the past, made a rather limited use of TAs. Given that some TAs are a little bit junior (that is to say, 3rd year students), English does not usually permit TAs to grade student work, except where the grading is relatively objective, as with grammar quizzes. This has meant, at times, that TAs haven't been able to substantially ease the workload of the instructor. The department has discussed our under-use of TAs on a number of occasions and we are presently using them with a little bit more variety and in a way that provides the TAs with a little bit more professional range. TAs lecture where the subject of the course comes close to their own interests, and we divide their hours between professorial help and the now-online Writing Centre. Our previous report notes their expanded role in "supporting upper-year courses, website initiatives, conference planning, and the development of portable teaching modules for TA delivery." Some

instructors use TAs in order to assist with in-class workshopping of assignments, which, if it improves the quality of work before submission, is of help to the instructor, to the students in the class and, in terms of their professionalization, to the TA.

12. The report asks the department to retire the term “sessional” in favour of a more “professional and affirming” language. The department disagrees. (Incidentally, even if this term were to be retired, that decision would not be the decision of a single department within the university.) Members of the English department are concerned that retiring the term “sessional” also euphemistically draws out of focus the precarious nature of those colleagues’ labour. On the last report, the department urged the Faculty to think, rather, about rendering some of those contracts more permanent in the form of instructorships. And, in fact, the department is yet more deprived of instructor positions than it was a year ago when the last of these reports was authored. At that time, we were down from 7 to 2 instructorships. Presently, we are down to 1.
13. The Faculty should prevent the disruptive removal of sessionals from their offices at the end of summer. The present work-from-home situation might displace attention from this issue, but sessionals should not be “removed” in that liminal period.
14. The department should review its use of TAs. This suggestion is very similar to #11, with the small added elaboration that TAs could be used for breakout groups and plagiarism prevention exercises, two good suggestions. The general recommendation is addressed in #11.

English 100 and Ethical Academic Writing:

15. The Unit Review stipulates that the department should undertake an urgent review of ENGL 100, and should also reconsider the relationship between ENGL 100 and ENGL 110 with a view to its own recruitment needs. The report asks for new course descriptions of these course to be ready for implementation in 2021. ENGL 100 is always on the department’s mind and is almost always discussed at department meetings, but at the Review’s urgent recommendation, the department, driven by its undergraduate committee, undertook a massive, multi-faculty consultation aimed at discovering how English 100 was serving or not serving the needs of the University. During that semester, the University was proposing that UNIV 150, a suggested university-preparedness class, could be chosen by students in place of ENGL 100, Critical Reading and Writing, and so it was all the more important for us to understand the role and value of ENGL 100 inside and outside of the English department. The University’s willingness to run UNIV 150 at 25 students, whereas the department of English has, for years, and in the wake of increasing challenges, run ENGL 100 at 40 students, also prompted a careful consideration of desirable enrollment caps. The Undergraduate Committee, after its consultation across faculties, filed a report to the department, whose recommendations were as follows (given with justification, which, for brevity, I will not include here):
 - a) Reword the English 100 requirements to identify the course ratio as 1/3 composition and 2/3 reading, to include both literary reading as well as persuasive and expository prose, whether academic or journalistic.
 - b) Retain and affirm the value of literary reading in composition and college reading instruction.
 - c) Categorize creative non-fiction and memoir with literary reading.

- d) Work with the Dean of Arts to commit the funding necessary to reduce the class size of Engl 100 to 25. [Note: we are running this class this year at 35 students, down from 40. The Unit Review suggests that, given everything that must be done in ENGL 100, the appropriate number is actually 20.]
- e) Task the Undergraduate Committee of the Department of English with the review of the Department Handbook regulations for English 100 and 110, following a review of the course cap for first-year classes.
- f) Renew the position of Coordinator of First Year English with clear terms of reference drafted by the Advisory Committee after a review of the Department Handbook and with course release funded by the Faculty of Arts. [The renewal of this position is a goal of the Unit Review itself and will be addressed later in this report.]
- g) Work with the line faculties and the Council Committee on the Academic Mission to establish and implement recommendations for pre-requisites to English 100, including high school average equivalents, and the implementation of the ELNAT as a first year English placement test.
- h) Work with the Academic Program Development Committee and the line faculties to review RDWT 120 for more general offering as a qualifying class for English 100.
- i) Work with the Core Curriculum Review Committee and other Departments in Arts to develop an advanced version of English 100 – “105” – which would also serve as an introduction to literary studies.
- j) Work with Student Success to develop an extended orientation program emphasizing good practices for academic success

The department always found the Unit Review’s report for revised proposals for ENGL 100 and 110 impractical at this stage and the fall 2021 implementation deadline was, even before the pandemic, unfeasible. We are not pursuing new proposals at present, but may discuss this with the incoming Coordinator of First Year English, which will be discussed in item #27.

16. The University should convene a round-table on the current crisis in ethical writing. The misconduct problem is university-wide, yes, and is an urgent issue. The problem is particularly visible in the first-year required course, ENGL 100, and has been exacerbated by the move online. At present, we rely heavily on the vigilance of individual instructors and on the Turnitin software. The Head of English sits on the Writing Supports Committee. Should the University decide to convene a round-table on this issue, the English department will be sure to be present at the discussion.

Review of the Senior Curriculum

17. The English department should review the senior curriculum. The English department’s curriculum review is one of the largest tasks recommended by this report. Preliminary steps were taken during the tenure of the last headship, mainly consisting of a number of meetings and retreats during which the department worked with a consultant, Gwen Dueck, to discuss general aspects of program envisioning. A committee was struck to tackle the issue of researching how comparator institutions *structure* their English programs, with a particular interest in those institutions that have English and Creative Writing programs. When the pandemic arrived and two members of that committee found themselves working full time

while homeschooling, the task of attending to the broad question of program structure became impossible. The committee disbanded with the idea that it could be re-struck in the fall. At that time, many members believed that things might be back to normal by that time. In fact, we are *still* labouring under pandemic conditions and with a department reduced in number by three senior faculty members, so curricular issues have been put largely on hold, except for the streamlining described in the next item (#18).

18. The department should create a more streamlined curriculum with clear learning outcomes at each level. Here we have good progress to report. The department's recent course audit, which was carried out centrally by the advisory committee, but with massive consultation from all members, has resulted in a much more streamlined set of course offerings. As a result of this audit, we have moved about 70 courses from active to inactive status, about 55 courses from inactive to historical status, and about 36 courses directly from active to historical status. It should be noted that some of these courses are simultaneously-taught 400-lv/800-lv courses, but the audit still represents a considerable streamlining of our course offerings. As for the clear outcomes at each level, we believe that we do offer such clear outcomes, but will review those as part of the general curricular overhaul that should be reanimated in the near future.
19. The department should consider cross-fertilization with other units. The department has been approached by MAP to consider combining creative writing credits so as to create a minor in Writing for Stage, Screen and Media. This is an excellent suggestion; it stands to increase the number of writing courses available to MAP while helping English compensate for a present *lack* of expertise in scriptwriting and new media, which are areas of interest for students within creative writing. We are very interested in pursuing this suggestion, and will do so in the near future. My predecessor notes, as well, the interdisciplinary possibilities presented by the department's new focus on the Prison Writing Exchange, which might invite participation by students from journalism, social work, justice studies, and community interests at large. (I might add that if creative writing ever became an element of that program, other people from the department and the community might be drawn in.) However, that course has been on hold during the pandemic, and, as the previous head, noted, it is in any case very early to explore what the cross-curricular valences of that program might be.
20. The department should create some large-enrollment classes, particularly in those areas that draw large number of students from across programs, like Harry Potter or George R.R. Martin. This suggestion hasn't been discussed, and the member who teaches in both of the suggested areas is presently on sabbatical.
21. Given the robust relationship between First Nations University and the Department, the department should decolonize its classroom texts and methods of instruction. First Nations University is presently restructuring its programs, and Dr. Jesse Archibald-Barber has offered to visit the department before the winter term is over so as to explain those curricular changes: we hope that, because we are at the beginning of our own curricular overhaul, we can make the department's curricular changes dovetail with those of FNUC. Decolonizing our offerings has to be reflected in hiring priorities and program restructuring. We were advised by the Unit Review to develop a hiring strategy around the recent arrival of Canada Research Chair in Truth, Reconciliation and Indigenous Literatures, Dr. Michelle Coupal. The department's priority in the last round of BAC requests was, upon first discussion, was to hire a scholar working in Indigenous Literature. However, because Indigenous Literature scholars are presently being

sought in English departments across Canada, we resolved to form the request instead as a hire in critical race studies, naming several key desirable areas: Indigenous Literature, Black Literature, South Asian Literature, and Latinx literature in Canada and beyond. It is my belief that the department should also create Indigenous Literature as a program requirement for majors, but this possibility hasn't been discussed with the department and I am as yet unsure as to how to create such a requirement.

22. The department should reinstate the joint B.A./B.Ed. degree. The department is in favour of this decision, and its programming overlaps in certain key ways with the B.Ed., but such major programming/curricular undertakings are presently on hold.

Graduate Studies

23. The department should expedite the introduction of the project-based M.A. There is positive progress to report here as well, as the project-based M.A. (in both M.A. streams) is on the books and open to students, as of Fall 2020.
24. The department's next hire should facilitate cross-fertilization between departments. We hope that this may be the case. The position articulated in (21) may have cross-disciplinary appeal.

Departmental Governance

25. The Review calls for an expanded role, within departmental governance, for sessional colleagues and members of the federated colleges, particularly encouraging participation from all members in the project of curriculum review. The department will seek wide consultation from all members in curriculum review. At present, there is a place for federated college colleagues on all departmental committees. Sessionals have (collectively) two votes when voting for department head. We will continue to consider how best to involve the colleges and our sessional colleagues in major departmental matters.
26. The Unit Review calls for an expansion of the role of Danielle Myers, and a new job title, possible Undergraduate Program Administrator. We now have a wonderful new admin, Charity Redding. It seems foreseeable that she may want an expanded role and a different title, but her new arrival rather "re-set" this particular suggestion, so we will keep it in mind.
27. The Unit Review asks English to revive the dormant position of The Co-Ordinator of First Year English. As of next fall, the department will have somebody in this role again. We are at present in the process of voting on a LTA-to-tenure-track conversion in Rhetoric and Composition and Creative Writing. The job partially entails that this person will be the new COFYE. If the conversion process does not result in the LTA-member being converted to this position, an external search will still seek to fill this role.

In sum, we've had a difficult time pursuing all of the Unit Review's many suggestions during the pandemic, and some of the larger ones, in particular the curriculum review, are lying fallow. However we have made progress in a number of areas, including streamlining the curriculum, better foregrounding Creative Writing on the department website, instituting the project-based M.A.,

doing some “envisioning” groundwork towards our curricular review, and canvassing all faculties for input into the role and future of ENGL 100. We have also sought to promote literatures under-represented in our present curriculum through our current hiring request, and we are at work, albeit in a preliminary way, in exploring some new options for creative writing, including the certificate program and a potential cross-disciplinary minor.

Thank you for your attention to this document and to the state of English’s evolving affairs.

Best wishes,

Medrie Purdham,

Head, English