



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
Academic Program Review
English

EXTERNAL REVIEWERS

Kevin J. H. Dettmar, *W.M. Keck Professor and Chair, Department of English,
Pomona College*

Christine So, *Associate Professor and Director of Undergraduate Studies,
Georgetown University*

Brighde Mullins, *Director, Master of Professional Writing Program,
University of Southern California*

CAMPUS VISIT: April 15-17, 2009

The review team read the self-study written by the faculty in the department; reviewed the curriculum, course syllabi and evaluations; conducted class visits; interviewed faculty, students and staff; and met with the Dean, Associate Dean and other relevant members of the campus community. Prior to their visit, the reviewers were provided with USF's Vision, Mission, Values Statement, the department's self-study and other university materials.

1. How did the external review committee rate the quality of the program – excellent, very good, good, adequate, or poor? How does the program compare with benchmark top-tier programs nationally? Please provide a brief rationale for the external review committee's rating.

- Overall, the review team rated the Department as “good” (and the creative writing emphasis as “very good”) but felt that, with just a renewed focus, mission and commitment, it could be much better.

2. What are the most important general issues that emerged from the external review process?

1. *Curriculum:* The curriculum is need of revision to make it more conversant with contemporary emphases and trends in the discipline. It also needs a more coherent vision, one that articulates the department's academic priorities while rendering more visible how their work prepares students to “fashion a more humane and just world”.
2. *Faculty:* Before any further faculty hiring in literary studies takes place, the department needs to have an intensive discussion of curricular reform. However, the review team felt that there was a pressing need for an additional tenure line in creative writing with a specialization in nonfiction.
3. *Students and Student Learning:* The reviewers observed that many students were English majors “because they intended to pursue careers in education, specifically the teaching of English”. They encouraged the department to think broadly about what kinds of skills might enable their students to achieve a range of different futures that were also as critical, informed and empowering as teaching.

3. What specific recommendations for improving the program's quality has the external review committee made to the Dean?

Curriculum

- The department could strengthen itself by “focusing on a few areas of real excellence” rather than attempting to do too much in terms of disciplinary coverage.
- The curriculum needs to be more inclusive of recent trends, debates and conflicts that have shaped the discipline in order to keep pace with developments in the field.
- Lower the number of required courses needed to fulfill the major.
- Raise the number of electives offered and tie them more closely to areas of faculty research interests.
- Give some thought to opening some literature classes to non-English majors.
- Consider introducing some kind of “literary methodology” course that might serve as a prerequisite for more advanced English courses that could be open to non-majors who had taken the prerequisite.
- Given the interdisciplinary nature of contemporary English studies, it would be fruitful for the department to consider relationships with other departments/programs, e.g. Media Studies, Performing Arts and Social Justice, Gender and Sexuality Studies, etc.
- In Creative Writing, there is a need for a tier of intermediate level workshops with small class sizes to “support and amplify student research.” These workshops need to include more nonfiction, poetry, screenplay and dramatic writing options.
- There is a need for more elective courses in Creative Writing.
- Given the changes in the publishing industry, there should be a seminar/workshop around blogging, internet writing and other electronic media.

Faculty

- The department can make best use of new faculty hires when it has resolved some of the issues related to curriculum outlined above. However, there is a real need for a new tenure track line in creative writing in the area of nonfiction.
- The department has been attentive to questions of racial diversity and “recent efforts to hire in Latino/a Studies demonstrate their commitment to adding more minority faculty to the department.” The reviewers noted that women were also well represented on the English faculty.
- The review team commended the department for the “progress it has made in reducing its dependence on part-time adjunct faculty.”
- The department should exercise some creativity and imagination in re-establishing a real research culture in the department.
- The department would benefit from a re-consideration of the ways in which it conducts business and how it reaches decisions, particularly in terms of broadening its understanding of consensus decision-making.
- The reviewers applauded the rigor that informs the current major but encouraged the department to consider “other forms of excellence” beyond the traditional measures.

Students and Student Learning

- The reviewers found the students “intellectually engaged, committed to the discipline and confident of the skills and knowledge they had acquired in their courses.”
- While the students existed as “intellectual community” and had a “comprehensive understanding” of English as a discipline, they also expressed some frustration with the limited course offerings at USF compared with other universities.

4. In the opinion of the external review committee is the program following the University's strategic initiative in that it is;

- a. Recruiting and retaining a diverse faculty of outstanding teachers and scholars.
 - The reviewers were “impressed by each faculty member’s commitment to teaching, students, and to the best possible future for the department and the university as a whole.”
 - The team also appreciated the “department’s efforts to ensure that their students were properly and specifically trained within each course level.”
- b. Enrolling, supporting and graduating a diverse student body that demonstrates high academic achievement, strong leadership capabilities, a concern for others, and a sense of responsibility for the weak and vulnerable.
 - The review team noted that the “majors with whom we met have clearly enjoyed a good literary training and were remarkably thoughtful about the discipline of English studies and its relation to larger issues within contemporary culture.”
- c. Providing the environment necessary to promote student learning in the program.
 - The reviewers noted that the faculty’s dedication to teaching and to excellence in the classroom is of great benefit to the university at large.”

5. In what way is the program contributing to the goal of making the University of San Francisco a premier Jesuit, Catholic urban university with a global perspective that educates leaders who will fashion a more humane and just world?

- While there was some room for further inclusion of the “unique mission of USF into the very fabric of the English Department’s curriculum”, the review team also noted that faculty “regularly do research and teach classes that engage fully with...social and political issues.”

6. What is the timetable for the response to the external review committee’s recommendations for program improvement? What can the AVP’s office do to appropriately respond to the review?

- Hire a full time tenure track faculty member in creative writing with an emphasis in nonfiction.
- Provide resources and support for the department to address strategic planning and curricular reform.

7. What general comments or issues, if any, are crucial to understanding the reviewers report?

- The department has collegial and productive working environment in recent years after a period of some difficulty. The review team encouraged the department not to think of the “past” or “future” in terms of particular faculty members or cohorts but to build upon their common collegiality and shared “commitment to the future of the department” to address the issues raised in the report.