

Department of English

“Reflection Year” Assessment report

November 1, 2022

For the last several years, the Department of English has been engaged in a curriculum revision of our major. Inspired by our observations of the curriculum as detailed in the self-study prepared for our most recent Academic Program Review (AY 2016-17) as well as by the recommendations suggested by our external reviewers during their campus visit, we have held a series of faculty retreats. During these retreats, we reflected on the strengths and weaknesses of our program’s curriculum, as well as the gaps and overlaps created by faculty research areas and teaching interests. In revitalizing our curriculum we have focused mainly on the literature courses and the sequence of courses in the literature concentration. The writing concentration curriculum has been highly rated in the last two program reviews, and so didn’t seem in immediate need of revising, but because students in this track take five of their required twelve English courses in literature, any revisions to the literature courses/curriculum have implications across the whole program. There was a third concentration in the department at the time—the Honors in English track.

At our first retreat held in the spring of 2018, we approached the curriculum at the macro level. We formulated a list of questions about our students and department that have guided our efforts since. They include: *What are our shared priorities as a department? How do we highlight our current department interests instead of adhering to a probably outdated framework? What do we need to equip our students to do at USF and beyond? How do we connect course material to USF’s social justice mission? What do we actually want our majors to read and how do we do coverage – if at all?*

Next, in subcommittees formed at the first retreat but which met separately for the next several months, we discussed particular courses and levels of the curriculum,

returning to the larger group with findings and suggestions. Each of these subcommittees presented data and recommendations in turn at monthly department meetings during AY 2018-2019 and in a second all-day faculty retreat held in August 2019.

As a result of these discussions, the first significant change made to our curriculum was eliminating the requirement that all majors and minors take ENGL 192: Introduction to Literary Study. Previously the gateway course to the major, this course offered a crucial community-building opportunity for cohorts of students. But the course also posed many challenges to instructors: it needed to introduce two different subsets of students (the literature and writing track students) to the major; it needed to teach students the practice of literary analysis; it needed to teach students how to create original arguments about literature; it needed to teach students how to effectively articulate those arguments in speech and writing. For some faculty, this was too tall an order for an introductory course, and it fell to a dedicated few to offer the course (usually more than one section) every semester. As a department, we wondered whether the skills of interpretation, analysis and articulation could be taught just as well in the 200-level courses, which are typically populated mostly by non-majors—all of these courses satisfy the literature requirement in the College's core curriculum. The external reviewers shared with us that in their interviews with students, our majors and minors find these courses very appealing but our current literature track curriculum didn't offer many opportunities to take them.

Around the same time, we also determined that the literature track curriculum needed to build in more of a progression of skills, as the writing track curriculum already does with three consecutive levels; students take two Introduction to Writing courses in two genres, two genre workshops and two Special Topics in Writing courses before their capstone Senior Seminar in Writing. We created a possible outline of such a tiered curriculum. In this scenario, the so-called "period" courses of Literature 1, 2 and 3 (ENGL 310, ENGL 320 and ENGL 330, respectively) would move down to the 200-level and all three would be required for literature track students. The 300-level would be

reserved for Special Topics courses (formerly at the 400-level), ENGL 340: Shakespeare and the minority issues literature requirement. For the new 400-level, we would create advanced seminars in literature; in these courses, students would produce research papers that more closely resembled the work required of them in ENGL 491: Senior Seminar in Literature. One problem our curriculum revision seeks to address is the sense that some literature track students arrive unprepared at this capstone experience. The department voted in favor of this outline; the number of required units at each level was not yet determined. How to differentiate between the 200-, 300- and 400-levels in terms of assignments and the scope of possible topics was also left undecided.

During AY 2019-2020, we sidelined much of our English major curriculum revision discussion when the opportunity arose to bring the Comparative Literature major, then housed in Languages, Literatures and Cultures (known at the time as Modern and Classical Languages) into our department. Formulating a proposal (which included creating a new curriculum and working out many logistics, including faculty teaching assignments) took the better part of the academic year. We wanted to be good stewards of the Comparative Literature program, of course, and to facilitate a smooth transition between its former and new departments. Also, the previous Comp. Lit curriculum had included some English courses in its curriculum, and because we formally incorporated a few of the 300-level literature courses from English into the new version of the concentration, we needed to pause any revisions to those courses. The Comp Lit track—the fourth in our department—now attempts to balance electives between courses from English and those in the target language.

The spring semester of 2020 presented another obstacle to our efforts when our department (and all of USF) had to unexpectedly and immediately transition to remote learning at the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic brought with it several other challenges besides the new modality: university-wide budget cuts, lower enrollments, a lower retention rate in the College, and in particular, a noticeable loss of majors and minors in our department. (As of December 2020, we had seen a 40%

decrease in English majors in about five years). As we continued to hold faculty retreats and reserve time during monthly faculty meetings for these continued discussions, we shifted our focus from revising the curriculum to strategizing how to more effectively retain the students we had and how to attract more students to our program.

Some of our efforts included changing outdated or inaccurate course names. ENGL 202: Great Works of Western Literature was changed to Literary Works. This allowed us to be more flexible in our offerings. Under this new interpretation, individual sections of the course can focus on topics as varied as Gender and Sexuality in Shakespeare or Latinx Literature. ENGL 399: Critical Analysis was changed to Literary Theory to better capture how the course is currently framed. We also updated the name of our “minority issues” requirement for majors and minors to the Race, Ethnicity, Gender and Sexuality (REGS) requirement.

Due to an enrollment policy adopted by the University, we had to cancel Special Topics in Literature for a couple of semesters in a row. This course had previously been a repeatable option for literature track students toward their five required upper-division literature electives. As a department, we decided to begin requiring literature track students to take two Special Topics in Literature courses in hopes of ensuring the course could fill to the acceptable level of enrollment. The same enrollment policy forced us to graduate two cohorts of literature track students without them being able to take the required Critical Analysis/Literary Theory.

In the fall semester of 2022, we began to work on revising our program learning outcomes (PLOs). They were last revised in 2013, and then, only superficially. After a discussion, we determined the outcomes don't represent the department's current pedagogical priorities. When these PLOs are mapped onto the courses in our curriculum, there are also large gaps; the goals of the writing courses in particular are not well captured by the current PLOs. To begin our revision, we shared examples of individual course learning outcomes as a way to detect patterns that might reveal a

shared vision. This work will continue in AY 2022-2023. We hope to submit the revised PLOs to the College Curriculum Committee in the spring semester for their approval.