

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Academic Program Review
College of Arts and Sciences

DEPARTMENT/PROGRAM

Rhetoric and Language

EXTERNAL REVIEWERS

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CAMPUS VISIT

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Draft reviewed and approved by: Faculty of the Dept. of Rhetoric and Language & Dr. Jeffrey Paris, Associate Dean
for Arts and Humanities

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

The external review committee gave the Department a rating of VERY GOOD. The reviewers “found arriving at a single rating for the Department of Rhetoric and Language somewhat challenging. They stated this “is a department that has the potential to be excellent,” but “the conditions the department is working under are merely good.” The External Reviewers commended the Department’s highly qualified faculty, thoughtfully designed and taught classes, attention to Area A Core, and contributions to “the success of teaching and learning across the University.” They noted this Department is “unique for reasons that are commendable, including the diverse expertise of its faculty and the successful integration of writing, speaking, and academic English language learning within its curricula.”

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

The External Reviewers cited internal challenges “with an imbalanced faculty heavily weighted towards reliance on non-tenure-track and part-time positions, a limited ability to engage and support part-time faculty in professional development and planning, and too many simultaneously active initiatives.”

The Review team also identified a number of “constraints within which the DR&L (Department of Rhetoric and Language) operates,” including the “structure and governance of the Core, which is ultimately determined outside of the department; limits of physical plant, which create restrictions in the classrooms, centers, and within the department; hiring practices, including caps on tenure-line professorial faculty and contract lengths for full-time term faculty; college- and university-level protocols for things like CRs (course releases) and sabbaticals; union guidelines that inflect everything from teaching assignments to lines of departmental communication, etc..”

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

- I. Streamline and sharpen the focus of curricular offerings to strengthen student learning and simplify advising.
- II. Improve working conditions and professional support for DR&L faculty on all levels, over the long and short term, from improving the ratio of FT to PT faculty to providing clarity with regard to employment to providing additional faculty development opportunities for PT faculty.
- III. Improve intradepartmental and interdepartmental communication, including assessment efforts, including improving information sharing among DR&L faculty and creating more opportunities for meaningful engagement with “cooperating” units (e.g., the Core, Communication Studies).
- IV. Clarify short- and long-term priorities for the DR&L as a whole and for functional subgroups (e.g., AEM, academic advisors) by establishing clearly sequenced and prioritized short- and long-term plans.
- V. Establish and maintain an Institute for *Eloquentia Perfecta* (IEP), a resource based on faculty members’ disciplinary expertise that can integrate and coordinate (and thus streamline) current DR&L resources and programming, including the speaking and writing centers, while increasing the department’s capacity to serve the university and adjacent community in impactful and innovative ways.

4. In the opinion of the external review committee, is the program following the University’s strategic initiatives?

Due to the number of courses provided by this Department to the USF Core Curriculum, the External Reviewers found “this naturally makes the work of the department integral to the University’s mission” and explained a historical connection between the study of rhetoric and the Jesuit educational tradition. They wrote, “We were impressed with the thoughtfulness of the integration of theory and practice in the introductory writing and speaking courses taught

out of the department, which regularly combine sophisticated and important primary readings (Aristotle, Foucault, contemporary journal articles) with relevant practical textbooks and plenty of opportunity to practice. This combination reflects best practices at other institutions and reflects explicit strategic choices on the part of the DR&L faculty developing those courses.” The Reviewers found that, “the Department’s work is well-aligned with overarching goals of the university and with the goals of the Core. We have no substantive recommendations to improve this alignment, and applaud the department for its commitment to this important work.”

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?

As mentioned above, the Reviewers found that the department exemplifies the Jesuit identity especially well through thoughtful instruction and curriculum and that the Department is “blessed with an excellent team of faculty.”

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

The next step is for the Dean and Associate Deans to meet with the faculty (full-time) of the Department of Rhetoric and Language and discuss the action plan based on the self-study and reviewers’ report. Based on the reviewers’ suggestions, the Office of the Provost could assist the program by: thinking critically about the breakdown of full- to part-time faculty within the Department; considering options for “instruction in writing at upper division levels in the USF Core” which can also give faculty within the Department greater opportunity for growth and development; considering options for streamlining curriculum; and by increasing resources to assist with the development of faculty advising skills.

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

No additional information is necessary to understand the report.