

English Department Strategic Plan 2/13/2009

Section 1 English Department Description

1.1 Mission, vision, and goals

Mission

The study of literature has always been a way to experience the past, reflect on the present, and imagine the future, and in recent years the texts that we are reading come in many and varied forms. We continue to read in the traditional genres--fiction, drama, and poetry--but we are also drawn to study memoir, film, archival documents, graphic and cyber novels. Whatever we study--whether a medieval ballad or a detective film--we put the emphasis on reading close, thinking creatively and critically, and writing well. Just as we are interested in many different kinds of texts, we are also eclectic in our theoretical and critical approaches, finding many ways to connect literature with science, history, culture, and other intellectual fields--but always, we come back to the literary text as a unique way of telling us about the world, telling us what others believe and value, as we learn to think and write about our own beliefs and values. (proposed new mission statement)

Vision

The English Department recognizes the vital role the literary arts occupies, and has occupied, in the world. We commit to leading and working with students and the community to teach and to demonstrate that:

- language is powerful and has the capacity to change the world;
- there is no better way to tell the story than to tell it as story;
- the multiplicity of voices we hear and read reflect the diversity and complexity of the world around us;
- how to read and discuss literature and film and in multiple contexts (historical, cultural, ethical);
- how to see [all kinds of] literary texts as an integral and inter-related part of a liberal arts education;
- how to advance (and enhance) the pleasure of reading and writing creatively;
- bring their engagement with the multi-genre texts they study into campus-wide discussions of issues that are of concern to the whole community (issues of justice, peace, community and service);
- share the pleasures of reading and writing with others.

In order to accomplish this vision, we look forward to developing new pedagogies in the classroom and new opportunities for students to learn outside of the classroom. We look forward to developing co-curricular opportunities to capitalizing on existing strengths in literature and creative writing. And we look forward to continued and increased advocacy of the Humanities on this campus and in the world at large.

Goals

Although it is tempting for an English Department to take its cue from *Hamlet* as it determines what to be, we look instead toward Charlotte Perkins Gilman, who, writing in her self-published reformist-minded periodical, *Forerunner*, declared: "There are three governing laws of life: To Be; To Re-Be; To Be Better."

Goal #1: To Be

Know what the English Department means for a variety of audiences, and develop mechanisms to spread the word in more effective, wide-ranging, and contemporary ways.

Goal #2: To Re-Be

Maintain our commitment to and practice of teaching excellence in our discipline and in interdisciplinary programs, and commit to develop new areas of expertise, pedagogies, and venues to enhance our students' learning.

Goal #3: To Be Better

Engage faculty and students more fully in the profession, the disciplines, and its ways of expression.

1.2 Programs

The English Department is composed of 13 tenured and tenure-track faculty whose areas of expertise are varied, ranging from early British literature to film studies. English faculty are researchers, scholars, poets, film critics, and fiction writers. Several courses are taught each year by adjunct instructors, depending on area of need. All faculty are expected to be generalists, with both the ability and willingness to teach courses at all three levels, majors and general education courses, and in a variety of areas.

The Department offers one major and one minor in English; students may opt for a "writing emphasis" in the major. We collaborate with Communication Studies and Education on the Communication Arts/Literature teaching major. Within our curriculum, we offer courses in literature, writing, and film.

The Department offers a broad range of courses both for the distributive general education curriculum (Curriculum I). Department members also contribute significantly to the January interim term, the First Term Seminar program, the integrative general education program (Curriculum II), and various interdisciplinary programs, including Environmental Studies, Gender, Women's, and Sexuality Studies, and Japanese Studies (we expect our new faculty member will allow us to contribute to Latin American, Latino/a, and Caribbean Studies, and possibly Peace Studies). On average, 21% of courses offered by English Department faculty are non-ENG designated courses; on average, we teach between 550 and 650 students each semester in ENG-designated courses. The Director of the Writing Center is a member of the English faculty.

1.3 Support relationships

In addition to the departments and programs noted above, faculty in the English Department rely on or utilize the expertise or resources, in varying degrees, of: Academic Advising, the Career Center, Center for International Cultural Education, Center for Vocational Reflection, Community Service Center, Disability Services, the Folke-Bernadotte Library, Gustavus Technology Services, and the Kendall Center for Engaged Learning.

Section 2 Strategic Review

2.1 Strategic Issues

The English Department is undergoing its 10-year review in 2008-09; external reviewers will visit the campus in spring 2009. Department conversations in preparation for that review suggest strengths lie in: pedagogical expertise and commitment, a desire to enhance what we do as a Department, faculty active and engaged in scholarship or writing, a willingness to contribute significantly to other curricular programs, and a commitment to faculty service on campus. Conversations also have suggested opportunities to improve our image and intentionality, some of our curricular offerings, and our knowledge and practice of emerging pedagogies and technologies.

2.2 Barriers

Like so many English departments across the country, we face students who are seeking what they perceive to be “practical” courses of study, a seeming decline in book culture nationwide, and an increasing interest in global issues. As a discipline, with other Humanities disciplines, we also face a paucity of funding at the national and local levels, and at times, lack of voices in leadership positions, at the national and local levels, that respect and advocate for humanistic study and the resources that are needed for it.

On the campus, obstacles include: 6-course teaching load, with most classes having enrollment capacities of 30 students. Given the tremendous amount of writing generated by students in our courses, and given our faculty's commitment to reading and responding to multiple drafts of that work, our enrollments are prohibitive. We also carry heavy advising loads, particularly at the first- and second-year level. We also lack adequate scholarship support, such as subvention funds for publishing, and funding (travel and grants) that keeps pace with increasing costs. We are concerned about a lack of technology resources, including seminars to learn new software and lack of a computer lab on campus large enough to hold many English classes (with enrollments of 30). We also see as an institutional barrier a lack of cohesive and motivated leadership for the Humanities division. Finally, some departmental inertia presents obstacles for us.

Section 3 Strategic Initiatives and Recommendations

Goal #1: To Be

Know what the English Department means for a variety of audiences, and develop mechanisms to spread the word in more effective, wide-ranging, and contemporary ways.

- a. Approve the redeveloped mission of Department, including sense that studying literature is practical; stress flexible and multiple skills of majors (in progress)
- b. Provide sense of real-world connections for students engaged in English studies
- c. Be more explicit and intentional about goals on syllabi, on department materials, and in talking with students.
- d. Provide on-campus and off-campus groups with more focused information about the English Department (e.g., Admission, alumni)
- e. Create a more focused and consistent web presence for department, alumni, and *Firethorne*
- f. Institutionalize regularized relationship with alumni (biannual workshop, mailings and surveys)

Goal #2: To Re-Be

Maintain our commitment to and practice of teaching excellence in our discipline and in interdisciplinary programs, and commit to develop new areas of expertise, pedagogies, and venues to enhance our students' learning.

1. Expose students to diverse local, national, and global perspectives or interdisciplinary perspectives in on-campus courses.
 - a. Re-imagine level 100 general education courses (in progress)
 - b. Develop a multidisciplinary program in Global Literatures
 - c. Consider ways that the English Department can cross-enroll with Theater Department courses, in order to provide our majors experience in drama
 - d. Work with departments of Art and Art History and Communication Studies to develop a multi- and inter-disciplinary focus in Visual Studies
 - e. Reconceive the Communication Arts/Literature Teaching major to better serve students according to fields in which they are teaching in secondary schools today

2. Expose students to diverse local, national, and global perspectives or interdisciplinary perspectives in co-curricular or off-campus opportunities.
 - a. Link upper-level English classes, perhaps senior seminar/capstone experiences, to travel component during January interim term or during class breaks.
 - b. Link some English courses more explicitly to co-curricular learning opportunities, such as service learning.
3. Capitalize on the traditional strengths of the English Department, literature and creative writing, by developing learning experiences that meld these two subdisciplines.
4. Develop and share new pedagogies and use new technologies to enhance student learning.
 - a. Advocate for a computer lab space large to enough to accommodate classes of 30 students.
 - b. Better educate faculty, a series of ongoing workshops designed to help faculty make virtual links to writers and scholars, help convert technological tools into pedagogy and student learning,
 - c. Better implement emerging technologies, advocate for a position in digital humanities.
 - d. Better share teaching expertise and experiences by proposing a departmental “teaching summit” to allow for collaborative teaching conversations among faculty.
 - e. Develop new areas of teaching expertise, by proposing a departmental “teaching fellowship” that would release faculty from a full load of teaching.

Goal #3: To Be Better

Engage faculty and students more fully in the profession, the disciplines, and its ways of expression.

1. Develop a writing workshop for Department faculty.
2. Develop and fund summer writing and scholarship seminars for our students.
3. Create opportunities for students to present their work in the Department.
4. Work with the Provost's Office and the Advancement Office to develop institutional support to enhance various components of the major and the community:
 - a. Endow a writer-in-residence program
 - b. Endow a visiting writer's series
 - c. Endow *Firethorne* and provide it with server space for an online edition
 - d. Endow a library collection of upper Midwest writers
 - e. Endow an international film festival
 - f. Increase funding for faculty professional development, teaching and scholarship according to disciplinary parameters, including subvention fees, writing contest fees, and conference presentation travel funds.
5. Continue to advocate to academic affairs leadership the importance of seeking Humanities-focused grant opportunities parallel to the HHMI.
6. Advocate to institutional leadership the importance of developing a Humanities-based conference parallel to the Nobel Conference.

Section 4 Assessment

Different strategies under each goal will require different markers of achievement. For some, additional funding or endowment will allow us to proceed. For others, institutional action will help us succeed. And for others, our own initiative will allow goals to come to fruition. Our achievement of the three goals is predicated on the fulfillment of the strategic initiatives.