

Senate Committee on University Planning

Academic Unit Review Summary: DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH LITERATURES

Site Visit	March 7-8, 2012
Informal Response to Planning	June 8, 2012
Formal Response to Planning	October 2, 2012
Implementation Update	April, 2014
Midterm Review	2016-2017

Summary of Departmental Self-Study: The study of English literature has been at the centre of the liberal arts curriculum of Mount Allison University since 1888. As is the case at many other universities, the teaching of English literatures is fundamental in a liberal arts university where emphasis is placed on the development of writing, critical thinking, problem-solving, and research skills. The curriculum is organized around national literatures (e.g., Canadian, American), sub-national and post-colonial literatures, women's literature, literatures of different periods and genres, as well as theoretical and cultural studies, and creative writing. Courses are almost all 3 credit hours, and the department has systematically offered its courses in rotation to maximize the range of course offerings for students.

The department's teaching caters to different types of students – those with an interest in the study of literature (i.e., students who plan to study English in the honours program, or as a major or minor), and those who are enrolled in English in order to satisfy distribution requirements or requirements for a future degree (e.g., professional programs such as Medicine typically require applicants to have completed a course in English). Institutional statistics from 2004/05 until 2009/10 show that the department taught 7.5% of total university course registrations.

At the time of the self-study, the department had a faculty complement of 8.5 FTE tenured faculty. Additional teaching is covered by a limited number of stipendiary and contract staff. Selected members of the department hold or have held endowed chairs (notably, the Charles and Joseph Allison Chair of English Languages and Literature, the William Purvis Chair in English Literature, and the Davidson Chair in Canadian Studies). The department is home to several award-winning (3M Teaching Fellowship, Atlantic Association of Universities Distinguished Teaching Award, and Tucker Teaching Award) teachers, and winners of the Paul Paré Medal and Paul Paré Awards of Excellence. Many members of the department have active scholarly programs that have garnered both internal (Crake Foundation, Marjorie Young Bell Faculty Fund) and external (SSHRC) grants.

The curriculum in the department has been revised since the previous academic review, and

these changes – along with the versatility of the academic staff – have allowed the department to offer a diverse range of courses that interest students and ensure that they are well prepared in their studies. Students who have graduated from the department have enjoyed success in their subsequent studies in graduate and professional schools, and in employment in a variety of sectors.

The department, while well-run and populated by a committed and engaged faculty and staff, has some challenges which centre on:

- the delivery of ENGL 1201;
- the impact of the changing student demographics (in particular, students with greater need for support in their writing)
- limited access to teaching assistants to serve in a supportive role in first year courses;
- limited access to stipendiary and contractually limited staff; and
- concerns about the lack of duplication of areas of expertise among the full-time faculty which has the potential to leave the department and its students vulnerable when individuals are on sabbatical or other leaves.

The department is engaged in the process of regular reflection, and is looking to develop various reforms and innovations to its courses.

Summary of External Reviewers' Report: The external reviewers' report spans a number of areas ranging from the infrastructure and human resources of the department, to the public profile of the department (through its website), to relations with other academic units and student groups, and matters related to curriculum, teaching, and learning. Overall, the external reviewers judged the department to be “highly functional and collegial,” with faculty who are “enthusiastic teachers and researchers.” The recommendations of the external reviewers are classified in several broad areas, as follows:

Human Resources

1. Replacement of a faculty position in the areas of Canadian literature and women's literature.
2. Ensuring qualified support staff in the department.

Infrastructure

3. Provision for consultation in the renovation of Hart Hall to ensure that modifications to classroom space align with the approaches to teaching and learning that will have maximum benefit.

Outreach and Public Profile of the Department

4. Revision and maintenance of the website for the department as a resource for students and others interested in the activities of the members of the department.
5. Provision of faculty mentoring and assistance to revive the student-led English Society.

Collaboration with Other Units

6. Redefinition of the relationship between Drama and the department.

Curriculum, Teaching, and Learning

7. Reimagining the introductory level courses for non-specialist students.
8. Considering the adoption of tutorial-based instruction in ENGL 1201.
9. Coordination of the multi-sectioned course, ENGL 1201, to ensure that students are exposed to common course goals, similar content and requirements.

Other

10. Institutionalizing the services and programs currently offered through the Writing Resource Centre.

Summary of Departmental Response: The department is generally supportive of all of the recommendations in the external reviewers' report. Members of the department have already begun to initiate pilot projects in the curriculum. Specifically, the department is expanding its Creative Writing offerings at the introductory level; it is expanding its Film Studies course offerings; and it plans to offer major and honours students a course in research methods. As well, the department is reviewing the delivery of ENGL 1201.

Planning Committee and Provost Response: The Planning Committee was pleased with the tenor and substance of the reflections contained in the department's self-study and its response to the external reviewers' report.

Concerns remain in three areas. The first of these focuses on the offering of introductory level courses, and especially ENGL 1201. The process of review is already underway. One suggestion is that the review and reorganization be informed by an orientation that takes into consideration the multiple reasons why students enrol in introductory English (i.e., to study English literature for its own sake; to acquire and/or develop writing skills; to satisfy admission requirements of other degree programs such as Medicine or graduate programs; or to fulfill distribution requirements). The department may wish to consult with colleagues in Mathematics & Computer Science for a model on tailoring introductory courses to meet the needs of diverse students and to ensure their preparation as they proceed through their academic programs.

Beyond the general review and reorganization of the introductory course offerings in the department, the Planning Committee was concerned about the lack of a standardized curriculum in ENGL 1201. In general, the Planning Committee felt that the department should reflect carefully on how to ensure that students enrolled in multi-sectioned courses are not subject to curriculum and evaluation that are vastly different. The Planning Committee is satisfied that ensuring some equitable treatment across multiple sections does not mean that all sections will be exactly the same. (The principle of equitable treatment of students in multi-sectioned courses should be enshrined in a University policy.)

In order to address concerns about student preparation and writing skills, the Planning Committee reflected on several possibilities: strengthening the Writing Resource Centre (a

matter with significant budgetary implications); individual departments specifying courses that might satisfy writing competency (this would require establishing standards and monitoring the implementation of the standards); and/or instituting a placement test for competency in English. One cost effective strategy is to consider offering a course designed to foster writing skills. Some universities have chosen the latter route, offering a writing course through a correspondence course. The department is developing such a course to be offered in the future.

With respect to the recommendation relating to the Drama program, the Planning Committee believes that a discussion of interdisciplinary programs that are nested within departments should be the subject of future discussions. This matter affects other units, and not only the Drama Program and the Department of English Literature.

Consideration of the personnel and other resource requirements of the department will be considered as part of the budget process in 2013-2014 and in the years ahead.