



**TO:** Mike Mahon  
President and Vice Chancellor

**DATE:** August 5, 2014

**FROM:** Robert A. Boudreau  
Chair, Academic Quality Assurance Committee

**RE:** Department of English, Academic Quality Assurance Review

In accordance with the U of L *Academic Quality Assurance Policy and Process*, the Academic Quality Assurance Committee approved the review of the Department of English at its March 28, 2014 meeting.

The Program Review Committee for this review was comprised of Adam Carter (Program Review Coordinator), Kiki Benzon, Craig Monk, Ian McAdam, Wendy Faith, and Maureen Hawkins. The review produced four documents:

1. *Academic Quality Assurance Review: Department of English Self Study Report* (received August 6, 2013) - self-study report developed by the Department of English Self Study Committee.
2. *Academic Program Review of the Department of English, University of Lethbridge* (received November 25, 2013) – External Review Report by Patricia Rigg (Acadia University) and Neil Besner (University of Winnipeg), based on their site visit of October 31 to November 1, 2013.
3. *Program Response to Externals' Academic Quality Assurance Review Report: Department of English, February 2014* (received February 7, 2014) – response of the Self Study Committee to the external review.
4. *Dean's Response to the Quality Assurance Review of English* (received March 24, 2014) – response to the review, written by Craig Cooper, Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Science.

---

All documents are available upon request.

## **Self Study**

As an overview, the Self Study Report made the following general comments:

- The English major is one of the most popular majors in the Faculty of Arts and Science.
- Faculty members are more successful than other Faculty departments in Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council and other funding competitions. They hold several national and international awards for research achievement.
- Two faculty members have received the Distinguished Teaching Award in the last five years.
- The department is understaffed. Within the faculty, it is #4 in size of major, #8 in number of credit hours, but #12 in number of tenure and tenure-track faculty members. The current faculty complement is ten, which will fall to eight by Spring 2014.
- Understaffing has some major negative effects: reduces the range and frequency of senior course offerings; limits attention faculty can pay to student writing; hinders the transition from an apprentice-based to cohort-based graduate program by limiting the number of standing graduate courses; and reduces the ability to recruit new students.

The report presented a list of issues upon which the department would like external advice:

- Current and future staffing needs.
- Deliverability, validity, and appeal of the curriculum.
- Consistency of requirements across different courses at different levels.
- Effectiveness of enrolment caps.
- Workload equity.
- Potential amalgamation of the Academic Writing Program and the inclusion of more composition into the curriculum.
- Increasing the viability of the M.A. program.
- Recommended practices for student advising.
- Increasing collegiality and departmental cohesion.

The report listed several future initiatives for the department:

- Hire an academic staff member in four areas: Modernism, Post-Colonial Literature, Canadian Literature, and Medieval/16th Century Literature.
- Revise the curriculum to strengthen the program and make it more deliverable.
- Address concerns with work equity.
- Enhance collegiality, perhaps through mediation and/or a faculty retreat.
- Boost student satisfaction by: lowering second year enrolment caps; offering fewer second year courses; eliminating some courses; offering more summer courses; exploring the offering of applied studies; and adopting a common grading rubric and grading scale.
- Standardize the third and fourth year prerequisites.
- Incorporate Academic Writing or include more composition in courses.
- Consider combined degrees with units like Modern Languages, History, and New Media.

- Develop a combined M.A. degree with Drama.
- Improve the English department website.
- Develop a department handbook that includes guidelines for best practices.
- Develop a strategic plan for the department.

### ***External Review***

Strengths of the program identified in the report include:

- The department has very good research productivity and a consistently developing research profile appropriate for the size of the institution. In particular, the breadth of research interests is notable.
- The department is well aligned strategically with the U of L.
- Faculty members are passionate about research and teaching and have received a commendable number of teaching awards.
- The Administrative Assistant is well qualified and highly organized.
- The undergraduate curriculum has a rich and varied program of courses.
- The department benefits from a vibrant graduate program.

The External Review Report noted several issues and challenges:

- Scant resources are allocated to the department, in comparison with the sciences.
- Upcoming faculty member retirements will pose serious problems unless at least one of these retired faculty members is replaced.
- Faculty members are concerned that the possibility of increasing teaching loads will negatively impact their scholarship and teaching.
- The department web page is poorly organized and the content is inconsistent or incomplete.
- The culture of the department can present some challenges.
- Among the department faculty there is a disparity in course loads and course allocations.
- There is no formal process for student advising.
- Graduate students take an undergraduate course with an enhanced workload, not specific graduate level courses.

These observations led to the following recommendations:

- Allocate new resources to the department appropriate to its research record, strategic alignment, and future potential.
- Develop a strategy for meeting its faculty resource needs and for hiring a replacement for the retiring faculty member.
- Approve a replacement position for the retiring faculty member as soon as possible.
- Maintain the standard teaching load at 2/2.

- Work to eradicate the perception of a tiered system of Academic Assistants/Instructors and Professors, and give the current Academic Assistants/Instructors more opportunities to teach senior and graduate level courses.
- Maintain a more robust and detailed web page that boosts the public profile of the Department.
- Consider ways to contribute to the Writing Centre.
- Meet with the Writing Program to discuss either pooling writing instruction expertise or building a more mutually beneficial relationship.
- Make greater use of the Liaison Librarian for English for teaching research methods to students.
- Ensure all faculty members take advantage of Library funds to ensure Library holdings represent departmental research strengths.
- Place a priority on fostering a collegial climate.
- Help students form an active English Society to build an engaged student culture in the department.
- Develop a formal Scholarly Methods program that provides students with information on opportunities for employment or advanced study.
- Adjust the allocation of undergraduate courses so it is more equitably distributed among the faculty complement.
- Establish a system of student advising coordinated by the department chair.
- Regularize graduate course offerings and recognize faculty members' teaching of graduate courses equitably.

### ***Program Response***

In its Program Response, the Self Study Committee noted its appreciation that the External Reviewers recognized understaffing is a critical issue for the department. The faculty complement of the department does not match its importance at the U of L or the number of English majors. The department is also understaffed when compared with English departments in other universities in Canada.

The Committee concurred with the External Review Report recommendation that the departing faculty member be replaced immediately, but also asserted that this replacement will not address the underlying issue of critical understaffing. According to national averages, the U of L Department of English should have a complement of at least 12 tenured or tenure track faculty, and to be nationally competitive should have 16. To address this requires four to five hires in the next five years. The Self Study Committee suggested that the department establish a committee that will work with the Faculty of Arts and Science and senior administration to address the understaffing issue.

The Program Response went on to respond to the remaining specific recommendations from the External Review Report:

<b>Recommendation:</b>	<b>Program Response:</b>
<i>Place a priority on fostering a collegial climate.</i>	The Committee agreed on working towards courteous, respectful, and professional relations that also value debate and disagreement. The department has already revived its colloquium series and has started planning regular social events for faculty and students. The department will also consider developing guidelines for collegiality to be included in a departmental handbook.
<i>Develop a strategy for meeting faculty resource needs and for hiring a replacement for the forthcoming faculty retirement.</i>	The Committee agreed, and noted that four new positions are needed, in the following areas: postcolonial literature; British and American modernist literature; late Medieval/early Renaissance literature; and Canadian literature.
<i>Maintain the standard teaching load at 2/2.</i>	The Committee supports this recommendation.
<i>Work to eradicate the perception of a tiered system of Academic Assistants/Instructors and Professors, and give the current Academic Assistants/Instructors more opportunities to teach senior and graduate level courses.</i>	The Committee agreed, but noted that addressing this recommendation has broader impacts beyond the department. The English department is open to a dialogue on this issue with university administration and ULFA. There will be some greater opportunities for senior level teaching by those classified as Instructors in the department. Curriculum revisions in English have resulted in some courses that Instructors teach at second year level being moved to third year courses.
<i>Regularize graduate course offerings and recognize faculty members' teaching of graduate courses equitably.</i>	The Committee supported this recommendation and aimed to work with university administration on achieving it. The chronic understaffing of the department makes this a challenge, however.
<i>Maintain a more robust and detailed web page that boosts the public profile of the Department.</i>	The Committee agreed and wrote that the department has begun to address this, with a detailed audit of the department website completed by a student. The department will implement the recommendations from this website audit.
<i>Meet with the Writing Program to discuss either pooling writing instruction expertise or building a more mutually beneficial relationship.</i>	The Committee stated that the department does not have a consensus on an association with the writing program and that this issue will have to be discussed further.
<i>Develop a formal Scholarly Methods program that provides students with information on opportunities for employment or advanced study.</i>	The Committee noted that they support this recommendation but are unsure how it can be implemented with current staffing levels.
<i>Consider ways to contribute to the Writing Centre.</i>	The Committee stated that the department will start to discuss this recommendation.
<i>Help students form an active English Society to build an engaged student culture in the department.</i>	The Committee agreed in principle with this recommendation. The department will hold more regular student and faculty gatherings and each Fall semester will meet with students to explore their interest in forming an English Society.

<b>Recommendation:</b>	<b>Program Response:</b>
<i>Make greater use of the Liaison Librarian for English for teaching research methods to students.</i>	The Committee accepted these recommendations.
<i>Ensure all faculty members take advantage of Library funds to ensure Library holdings represent departmental research strengths.</i>	
<i>Establish a system of student advising coordinated by the department Chair.</i>	The Committee agreed with this recommendation and noted that the department will aim to implement it. In Spring 2014 the department chair will act as departmental student advisor and at the end of the semester will report on the demands of this role. The department will then decide if it is optimal for the Chair to continue in this role or if a faculty advisor must be appointed.

### ***Dean's Response***

In his response, Craig Cooper (Dean of Arts and Science) noted that there are "deeper issues" to be addressed in the department, and went on to respond to the recommendations from the external review and the department's own response to those:

#### ***1. Replacements and hiring***

The department has been authorized to replace the retiring faculty member and are in the process of doing this. Two Instructors in the department provide teaching capacity. Given financial restraints, hiring four or five new faculty over the next five years, as the department requests, is unlikely.

#### ***2. Creating a collegial environment***

Steps to address this are:

- i. Hold at least two to three departmental meetings per term.
- ii. Continue the departmental colloquium.
- iii. Form a departmental subcommittee and task them to develop guidelines for collegiality for the departmental handbook. Ensure these guidelines are discussed and approved by the whole department.
- iv. Ensure a more equitable distribution of junior and senior level courses among tenured and tenure-track faculty and Instructors. Implement existing guidelines for providing instructors with opportunities to teach third year courses on a rotational basis. Ensure senior faculty teaching of first year English courses is a regular practice.
- v. Work towards creating an English Society for students. Start with organizing social functions and meeting with students in Fall 2014 to explore interest. Work with the manager of youth science programs for Destination Exploration, who has experience with outreach programs through INSPIRE.

#### ***3. Library***

Ensure the English department's Library representative takes a greater role in working with the Library and on coordinating book orders on behalf of the department. Have the Library representative report at departmental meetings on Library issues.

*4. Writing program and centre*

Begin discussions with the Writing program on what synergies can be developed and if the department can contribute to an English resource in the Writing Centre.

*5. Regularize graduate courses*

Humanities and social science departments may eventually adopt a different model of graduate programs. In this model the graduate student in humanities will take seminar courses before choosing a thesis topic and an advisor. Implementing this model will require more resources so more graduate seminar courses can be offered.

Restrict the number of cross-numbered courses, which can be attended by senior undergraduate and graduate students.


Regularize graduate offerings in English as much as possible.

Develop and regularize a formal Scholarly Methods program.

Other recommendations, such as revising the web page and revising the student advising system, are currently being addressed by the department.

The Academic Quality Assurance Committee is satisfied that the Department of English academic quality assurance review has followed the U of L's academic quality assurance process appropriately, and acknowledges the successful completion of the review.

Sincerely,



Robert A. Boudreau

Chair, Academic Quality Assurance Committee

Cc: Andrew Hakin, Provost and Vice President (Academic)