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TO: Antonio Moreira, Vice Provost  
FROM: Scott E. Casper, Dean, College of Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences  
RE: Academic Program Review, Department of English

I have carefully reviewed the Self-Study for the Academic Program Review of the Department of English (ENGL) and the report of the External Reviewers. The Self-Study highlights the Department's signature strengths and its progress since the previous APR, notably in curricular revision and assessment of student learning outcomes, and offers clear ideas about future directions. The External Reviewers' report provides useful analysis and recommendations about how ENGL can move forward, with appropriate assistance from administration. Both are thoughtful, important documents about a department with an essential role in UMBC's liberal arts mission.

**Context: To provide some context for the Reviewers' report, I offer some data on enrollment in the Department.** (This is routinely part of the CAHSS Dean's report for APRs.)

Student numbers: Posted IRADS data for Fall 2015 indicate that the department had 249 total majors (primary and additional plans), 146 minors, and 18 students in the master's program (Texts, Technologies, and Literature [TTL]). The number of majors represents a roughly 25% decrease since Fall 2012 (F12=332, F13=286, F14=256, F15=249). The number of minors has increased by 10% over that period (F12=133). The TTL program began admitting students in Fall 2013 and has grown each year.

Student-faculty ratios: In Fall 2015, the student-faculty ratio (SFR) for students in all plans was 14.9 for full-time faculty, as against 25.7 for CAHSS; it was 12.1 for all faculty, as against the CAHSS average of 21.3; and it was 31.0 for tenured/tenure-track FTE faculty, as against the CAHSS average of 35.6. The SFR for FTE students was 17.1 for full-time faculty, as against 19.7 for CAHSS; it was

14.0 for FTE faculty, as against 16.3 for CAHSS; and it was 35.7 for tenured/tenure-track FTE faculty, as against 27.3 for CAHSS.

The decline in majors reflects national trends, and historically it may not be as dramatic as the numbers above suggests because Fall 2011 and Fall 2012 represented a high-water mark (the number in prior years was 280-300). The data on SFR for FTE students should be understood in the context of the University-wide writing requirement, in several respects. The total number of students who take English because of this requirement tends to raise the ratio for tenured/tenure-track FTE faculty (though most do not teach English 100). At the same time, the relatively low ratio for FT and FTE faculty owes in part to the enrollment cap on English 100 sections. (Even so, this cap—in recent years 24 students—exceeds the disciplinary standard of 15-20 established by the National Council of Teachers of English and the Council for Writing Program Administrators to promote intensive core writing instruction.)

### **Reviewers' Evaluation:**

The Reviewers offer significant and, I believe, most appropriate praise for ENGL's endeavors in a number of areas:

- Substantial, effective work in responding to the recommendations of the previous APR, notably “carefully examin[ing] and reform[ing] its curriculum and reshap[ing] its mission to better meet the needs of its students and its role in the greater context of UMBC.”
- The Department's emphasis on communications and technology (CT) is appropriate to UMBC's “focus on science, engineering and IT.”
- Commitment to, and effective use of, student learning outcomes assessment using multiple modes of data collection; and awareness of student learning challenges requiring further examination.
- Outstanding faculty scholarship at all ranks, notably given a 3-2 teaching load for tenure-track faculty.
- Student satisfaction with faculty accessibility, “expertise as advisers,” and preparation for master's-level work (undergraduate literature track), and with “the innovation” of the TTL program and “the quality of training to teach first-year writing (graduate).

The Reviewers identify several areas for continued improvement, roughly in the categories of curricular breadth and diversity and faculty hiring; faculty issues (including communication between the faculty in WARD [first-year composition] and in the CT track); and recruitment and retention of undergraduate and graduate students. Because their report does not contain a separate list of recommendations, I will address their points topically, with reference to the recommendations embedded within different sections.

#### Curricular breadth/diversity and faculty hiring:

The Reviewers observe accurately that gaps in faculty specialization have produced curricular challenges, especially in two areas.

- First, multiple faculty resignations have reduced the **Communications and Technology** track. *I'm pleased that we will search for two faculty in this area next year* (one in CT, the other in

Digital Humanities with link to CT), to help shore up this area—though not yet expand offerings to meet demand in the undergraduate and M.A. programs.

- Second, “the department faculty is nowhere near as diverse as the student body,” and majors who met with the Reviewers described “the need for access to additional diversity offerings, including World and Asian-American literature.” The 2014 synergistic hire between Africana Studies (home department) and English (secondary department) provides several courses each year in African American and African diaspora literature, but clearly does not meet this need fully. Neither do the offerings in Asian-American literature of a faculty member in American Studies, although ENGL should continue to pursue cross-listing her courses and informing English majors of them. But the larger point of the Self-Study and the Reviewers is well founded: a search, ideally soon, in **multi-ethnic and/or postcolonial literature** would help address this curricular need and potentially help diversify the ENGL faculty demographically as well as intellectually. *I encourage the Department to continue its request for such a search through the regular College process.* (Although the Reviewers and the Department are rightly “wary of pursuing a policy that emphasizes joint hiring as a way of promoting collaboration,” one selling point for this search request might be the opportunity to cross-list courses with, say, Global Studies—thus expanding that program’s humanities offerings while broadening ENGL’s global reach.)
- *I endorse the Reviewers’ recommendation that ENGL revisit its existing multi-year hiring priorities and provide the Dean’s Office with a revised document,* which might also include other goals (e.g., Creative Writing; humanities and STEM) and identify how they comport with both Departmental and University objectives.

#### Faculty issues:

*Communication between WARD and CT faculty:* The Reviewers write that alignment between WARD and CT would provide “curricular benefits,” as the faculty members in each area might offer something to the other (“ongoing classroom expertise” of the former; “knowledge of current writing theory” of the latter). However, “a lack of communication seems to exist between the two programs, and WARD faculty have expressed concern about their status and sense of voice (avoiding a second-class status model) while CT faculty have expressed concern about opportunities for programmatic leadership and participation in WARD.”

It is impossible to determine from the Reviewers’ brief meetings with groups of faculty the depth of any communication problems. The potential benefits of alignment argue for attempting to bridge the perceived gap between these two groups. The Reviewers suggest “a meeting between the two programs, possibly facilitated by an external mediator, to foster transparency and shared governance moving forward.” *The Dean’s Office will discuss with the Department Chair the most appropriate way(s) to proceed, and will if necessary contribute to providing an external facilitator.* Because this issue does not appear in the Self-Study, assessing the depth of any communication problems may be the necessary first step.

*Faculty workload:* The Reviewers discuss several concerns that appear to have been expressed in their meetings with faculty members. One is the department’s 3/2 teaching load, described as “significant discontent from the associate professors”: “they feel that this really makes it difficult for them to get their research done during the academic year (they pointed to comparable humanities departments

that do have a 2/2 load, and they feel this disparity is unfair).” In CAHSS, departments with substantial graduate programs, where most tenure-track faculty members are engaged in graduate mentoring, typically have 2/2 formal teaching loads, with the graduate mentoring considered as the fifth course (and important to the calculation that the department meets the USM expectation of 5.5 course units per year). In the main, humanities departments at UMBC do not have substantial graduate students, and 3/2 is the normal course load. *ENGL appropriately uses its workload policy, revised recently and quite effectively, to provide credit for supervising independent study courses, thesis supervision, etc. (and not merely “course reductions through service”).* The Reviewers suggest a “floating one-course release, which could rotate among the faculty” for particular research projects to be accomplished; this strikes me as a sensible approach if a process for application and rotation can be devised without detriment to students seeking to complete degrees in timely fashion. I will note that English faculty members have routinely applied for, and often been awarded, the CAHSS Research Fellowship, which provides two course releases primarily for associate professors to complete projects en route to promotion. The Dresher Center also offers faculty fellowships that carry course releases. I appreciate that these opportunities are not a substitute for a regular 2/2 formal teaching load, and I am amenable to considering cost-neutral proposals that comport with the USM workload guidelines.

*Faculty mentoring:* The Reviewers recommend “additional structures” to assist pre-tenure faculty, such as “the need to reduce the numbers of course preparations and to clarify service expectations.” *This is a matter for departmental consideration, within its mentoring and workload policies.* The Reviewers’ suggestions regarding mentoring and recognition for non-tenure-track faculty members seem quite sensible to me (and I welcome the opportunity to consider more faculty awards to provide these faculty members with the recognition they richly deserve).

### Student recruitment and retention

**Undergraduate:** The Reviewers, citing “our current relentlessly utilitarian world,” explain that “all departments of English must make the case to prospective students and (increasingly) their parents that there is both practical as well as ethical and intellectual value in the pursuit of the study of literature, writing, and rhetoric.” They also describe students’ desire for more information about career possibilities with an English degree. *I concur with the Reviewers’ recommendation that “the department undertake more organized efforts in career education and mentoring.”* It may be useful to work with the Career Center to design relevant programs for students, for example forums with English alumni who have pursued various careers that draw on their UMBC English education. (Further collaboration and conversation with Media and Communication Studies, which has a thriving internship program, might suggest ideas; the Dean’s Office can facilitate conversation as necessary.) The Department does have a robust internship program, which it should build, promote, and systematize more fully.

**Graduate:** The Reviewers write that “the program must work to recruit students and grow the program to ensure more standalone master’s classes,” as well as “work with the College to support more graduate assistantships as this will positively impact recruitment, time to degree, and likely success in doctoral program placement.” *Offering more stand-alone graduate courses should be a departmental priority: of the 30 credits required for the degree, currently only 12 are necessarily graduate-only (ENGL 601 and 607 and the capstone/thesis/non-thesis credits.* It is not clear to me that offering more graduate-only courses requires a larger M.A. population, although certainly the University seeks to increase its graduate enrollment wherever appropriate and feasible.

*I am considering the request for more graduate assistantships as part of a College-wide review of resources. At this time, full GRA funding is available for approximately one-sixth of English M.A. students (3 of 18). It will be important to determine how this compares with funding for M.A. students in other disciplines in the College—though I appreciate that graduate student support is insufficient in most if not all of our master’s programs. For the present, I do not support internal reallocation from other categories of the departmental budget (e.g., unspent funds for part-time instruction), which is not necessarily a stable source for multi-year GRA support. (I am mindful of the Reviewers’ statement that “The department needs assurance that they will not be penalized for their demonstrated fiscal prudence.”)*

Miscellaneous other issues, discussed in the Self-Study but not by the Reviewers:

Curriculum: The Self-Study (pp. 90-91) describes several potential curricular revisions, including adding more flexibility within the major and revisiting the two-track structure of the Writing minor. *I encourage the Department to continue these discussions as part of a normal, ongoing process of reviewing curriculum—a process that includes also the various ideas in the final pages of the Self-Study.*

Diversity, Global Awareness and Civic Engagement (Self-Study, pp. 91-92): Though this topic is partly addressed in conjunction with faculty diversity (see above), the Self-Study also states that ENGL “needs to expand opportunities for students to engage with local communities and to showcase the intersections between scholarship in English and public life.” *Doing so would be most consonant with UMBC’s and CAHSS’s strategic vision, and I encourage this development.*

Smaller Class Sizes for Writing Courses (Self-Study, p. 93): *Done.* I have authorized ENGL to use some of its part-time instructional funding to reduce ENGL 100 sections to 22 students. (The funds are available because of the Department’s fiscal prudence, the recent hiring of additional Lecturers, and the decision that part-time faculty should no longer teach most upper-division offerings.)

## **Conclusion**

The Reviewers write, “A department of English is a cornerstone of any strong College of Arts and Sciences [*sic*], both for education and research, and this department lives up to that role.” I agree wholeheartedly. Our English Department has been a wellspring of curricular innovation and ingenuity, notably in recent years in its redesign of ENGL 100—a course required of all incoming UMBC freshman students—and its creation of the Texts, Technologies, and Literature M.A. program. Its faculty members, including Lecturers and Professors of the Practice as well as tenure-track faculty, have a well-deserved reputation as outstanding teachers and offer a wide range of courses in both literature and communication and technology. And the Department is committed to regular, ongoing review and revision of its curriculum based on an exemplary assessment plan. Equally significant, our English faculty members conduct path-breaking research across the areas within the discipline, publish in top venues, and receive considerable national and international recognition for their work (including several article and book awards).

The Department has received considerable, essential support in recent years in the form of several new Lecturer positions and (in the coming year) two tenure-track searches, and it has pride of place

in the Performing Arts and Humanities Building. At the same time, this should be only a start: work remains to be done, notably in building the faculty to offer a more global vision of the discipline and in providing students with an ever-clearer sense of the value (intrinsic as well as utilitarian) of an English education. I look forward to working with the Department to continue accomplishing its goals.

Cc: Orienne Smith, Chair, English  
Janet Rutledge, Vice Provost and Dean of the Graduate School