

Department of English Academic Program Review

Third Year Report Spring 2020.

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The Department of English completed its academic program review in 2016. This report assesses progress towards implementation of the department's Post-APR Action Plan, dated July 27 1016. The report will address the areas listed below as defined by the Action Plan document and proceed to enumerate the Department's strengths and the challenges it currently faces.

1. Curricular breadth and Faculty Hiring
2. Faculty Issues
3. Student Recruitment and Retention
4. Program Resources

Curricular Breadth and Faculty Hiring:

The department's ability to meet curriculum requirements in the discipline remains contingent upon the hiring of faculty whose specializations address departmental needs. We have made some progress towards hiring faculty qualified to fulfil research and teaching in required areas thereby ensuring our program remains robust and competitive with peer institutions. The following recommendations emerged from the action plan based on the reviewers' report.

- a. ***Additional hires in the Communications and Technology Track:*** The Department has since hired Dr. Drew Holladay and Dr. Earl Brooks in the Communications and Technology Track, whose respective specializations in disability studies and race studies support our commitment to a curriculum that addresses diversity.
- b. ***Revisiting existing multi-year priorities:*** After due deliberation, the Department presented Dean Casper in November 2016 with its hiring priorities for the next three to five years. The priorities may have since shifted because of vacancies arising from retirements since 2016.
 - (i) Hire of an Assistant Professor in Multi-Ethnic U.S. Literature: In 2018, the department hired Dr. Sharon Tran, who specializes in Asian, and Asian-American Literature. The Department currently has a promising post-doctoral fellow, Dr. Emily Perez, whose area of specialization in global literature adds strength to this important area of study.
 - (ii) Hire of an Assistant Professor in Global Technical Communication: In 2019 the Department hired Dr. Cynthia Vagnetti as Lecturer in English, to teach courses in this area that fall under the Writing and Rhetoric Division, and which serve the needs of English and non-English majors.
 - (iii) Professor of the Practice in Journalism: The departure of Mr. Chris Corbett, who retired in December 2019, has made this hire a pressing urgency. Journalism has been a popular and highly successful field of study in the program. The English Department's skill-based approach to

media and communication studies has produced an impressive record of alumni employed in prestigious organizations such as National Public Radio, National Geographic, The New Yorker and the Center for Public Policy. To sustain enrollments and ensure that this area remains a strength at UMBC, *the hire of a Professor of the Practice in Journalism has now become a necessity.*

- (iv) Assistant Professor in Global and Anglophone Literature: Multi-Ethnic Anglophone Literature is a major area of literary study in the twenty-first century, necessary for the study of contemporary classics by major authors who are Nobel and Booker prizewinners. A specialist in this area would address curriculum needs in English Education, where competence in Anglophone Literature is required, and enhance the range of research options available to students in our M.A. program.
- c. ***Tenure-track hire in Creative Writing:*** As a field that generates interest for students within and outside the department, Creative Writing is an area worth developing and strengthening in the future, both at the Undergraduate and Graduate level.

Faculty Issues

- a. ***Clarification of service expectations and the acceptable number of course preparations for junior faculty in the Department's mentoring Policy.***

In Fall 2018, a Mentor's committee consisting of the mentors of our four newly hired Assistant Professors held consultations and discussions with tenured and tenure track faculty and formulated explicit policies on teaching and service requirements which were approved and voted into operation. The department now has a Mentoring Policy document that is available for consultation and that articulates clear guidelines.

- b. ***Floating one course release for research projects.***

The Chair's Advisory Committee has formulated qualifying criteria for a Floating Course release. The Committee has since awarded the first course release to a faculty member, this year. All faculty who do not have official course releases are eligible to apply for the award to the Chair's Advisory Committee. We hope that this will help support research projects among faculty of all ranks.

- c. ***Recommendation for mediation between WARD and CT Track faculty***

This has not proved necessary as neither of the concerned parties wished to pursue the proposal. There has since been enhanced collaboration between WARD and CT in hiring searches, ongoing discussions over curriculum design regarding the role of WARD courses in relation to the CT Major, and the designing of lower-level courses taught by CT faculty.

Student Recruitment and Retention

- a. **Strengthening of Internship Programs**

The Department is conscious of the need to promote awareness of employment opportunities for English majors. To this end we have sought to enhance the range of Internships offered, and to

systematize our Internship program. We now have an Internship Coordinator who oversees the functioning of Internships, while publicizing internship opportunities and providing internship preparatory training where needed. Internships in journalism and publishing have proved especially popular with our students.

b. Enhancing our online presence through Facebook, Twitter, and improvements to the Department website

As a recruitment tool, the department has sought to publicize the activities and achievements of faculty, students, and alumni through social media, and has since acquired a Twitter account and a Facebook page, while also ensuring that our website reflects the dynamism and productivity of the department as a whole. New publications by faculty, research achievements by students, and success stories of alumni, are presented in a timely way, in order to demonstrate our unique capabilities when compared with other English programs in public institutions of the region.

c. Recruitment of Graduate Students and GAsHips.

The MA program in Texts, Technologies, and Literature continues to attract students with a variety of interests and career goals. Our students have gained admission to premier Ph.D. programs in literature, and in writing and rhetoric, and have found immediate employment in responsible administrative positions, and the IT sector. However, the need to grow the program is contingent upon financial aid, and the availability of GAsHips. The department has continued to petition for increasing the number of GAsHips, as we have often lost promising candidates to other programs because we could not offer them financial support.

Program Resources

We have begun offering online courses in Technical Communications. We are open to developing Certificate Courses but will need to take careful account of our existing staffing constraints in Journalism, Contemporary Anglophone Literature and Creative Writing before we proceed further.

Assessment of Current State of the Department:

Strengths and Assets

1. Our numbers have held steady and we are currently at 233 majors. Our program has been able to cope with the national trend of decreased demand for English as a major and has shown no dramatic alterations in strength.
2. The graduation rate for the English major remains high, but with room for improved retention.
3. Our courses are highly appreciated for their innovative interdisciplinary content. We currently enjoy cross-listings with a variety of departments while attracting enrollments from GWST, AFST, MCS, LLC, Education, and students in the STEM disciplines.
4. We are in the vanguard of Community-engaged scholarship in teaching and research, and offer courses focused upon Baltimore City and the region.

5. We remain strongly and successfully committed to diversity in the curriculum. Our courses address literature and rhetoric in African-American Studies, Asian and Asian-American Studies, Disability Studies, Gender Sexuality and Women's Studies, and Global Literature and Communication.
6. We enjoy a strong presence in regional and even national literary circles thanks to publications of high quality in poetry, fiction, nonfiction, and translation by non-tenured and tenured/tenure-track faculty.
7. We promote under-graduate research, with under-graduate students presenting peer-reviewed papers at major international conferences, in the United States and Europe.
8. A total of 4 books that were critical monographs (3 published, 1 in press) were published by faculty between 2016 and 2019 in Medieval literature, Early Modern literature, Early and Nineteenth-century American Book History, and Victorian Literature. The breakdown of publications is as follows: 1 by a Full Professor, 2 by Associate Professors and 1 by an Assistant Professor. Currently there are at least 12 monographs in progress: 4 by Assistant Professors, 5 by Associate Professors, and 3 by Full Professors. Our faculty have also edited critical collections and literary texts, and published essays in scholarly journals and critical anthologies. Since 2016, Dr. Fernandez, Dr. Smith, Dr. Shipka, and Dr. Maher have won CAHSS Fellowships, while Dr. Berman was awarded the Lipitz Professorship.
9. For the future, we foresee contributing courses to the Public Humanities program, and to the Computer Science Minor.
10. We are strongly committed to innovative teaching in our Writing programs using state of the art technology. We undertook a major initiative to upgrade our Writing Labs in 2019, and conduct training sessions for our faculty in the use of new technologies.

Challenges:

1. The Department is responsible for ensuring competence in reading and writing skills, University-wide. We have recently had to address demands citing COMAR for granting transfer equivalency to community college courses that did not fully align with ENGL 100 Student Learning Objectives. We have had to find temporary, but not entirely satisfactory solutions to accommodate such demands, which, if allowed to become precedents, could adversely impact our DWF and Graduation rates. The department remains alert to the negative consequences of admitting under-prepared transfer students with subpar writing skills who can enter upper level Writing Intensive Courses. We are currently exploring a variety of solutions to this potentially serious problem.
2. The English major is uniquely positioned to offer skill-based courses in writing and communication technologies. With the retirement of Mr. Christopher Corbett, we will need to prioritize hiring in this field, with especial attention to digital journalism.
3. The need to ensure greater flexibility between tracks in order to give students the option to customize their curriculum to suit their career goals is currently being explored. We recognize that a rigid curriculum prescribed by our track structure may not be the most effective strategy for recruitment in the future.
4. We also need to build upon our accelerated MA program by identifying talent in our undergraduate students and ensuring that the MA program can respond to their

interests and career goals. A major complication has been interpreting our MHEC response to Morgan State University, regarding concentrations in Creative Writing, and Screenwriting and Digital Storytelling.

5. The need for enhanced spending on Adjunct hires remains unavoidable for a department like English which needs to staff large numbers of lower level courses for Freshmen and Sophomores.
6. We are also striving towards enhanced financial support for our non-tenure track faculty who have their own research aspirations and publication agendas.
7. The need for research leave and funding for our tenured faculty cannot be overstressed. The critical monograph, rather than the journal article or the edited volume is the gold standard for scholarship in the field. Opportunities for outside funding, especially in British Literature and earlier literary periods remain limited. The availability of additional support for Associate and Full Professors is recommended for enhancing productivity and professional advancement in the department.
8. Finally, we need to increase enrollments through more outreach and coordination with community college programs to let them know of our strengths. This is especially significant for our CT Track which is relatively unknown to transfer students from community colleges.