



UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON
The Graduate School
G-1 Communications
Box 353770
Seattle, Washington 98195-3770

Telephone: (206)543-5900
Fax: (206)685-3234

October 17, 2003

To: David Thorud
Acting Provost

From: Marsha Landolt
Dean and Vice Provost

Re: Department of English 10-year Review

Summary and Recommended Action

At its meeting of April 24, 2003, the Graduate School Council met with members of the team reviewing the Department of English academic programs and with members of the Department of English and Michael Halleran, Divisional Dean for Arts and Humanities, at its meeting of April 24, 2003. The Council recommended continuation of the Department of English's BA, MA, MAT, MAT (ESL), MFA and PhD degree programs with a review 5 years after the appointment of a new Chair. The Department has suffered the loss of "an entire generation of scholars" over the last several years and continues to face serious challenges. To overcome them, the Department will need to virtually remake its culture with the faculty taking a much greater role in determining their own future as expected by the principle of shared governance. They will also need to adopt a method of operation by which they can collegially reach decisions and avoid crumbling into factions. While the Department clearly needs attention from the central administration, the Graduate School Council echoed the review team's finding that many of the problems of the department were of its own making. Acting Chair Richard Dunn and the faculty of the Department have begun to address some of the critical issues, but there is much left to do. Without a successful effort on the part of the faculty, the department cannot hope to compete with other key departments for increasingly scarce University resources. A successful transformation cannot be taken for granted, but the faculty are fully capable if they commit themselves.

I concur with the Council's comments and recommendations.

Background

The Department of English includes roughly 250 full and part-time employees. Among these are approximately 59 ladder faculty, 9 non-ladder faculty and 13 temporary teaching faculty. The Department has approximately 20 staff, a few of whom are not

employed for the full calendar year. Members of the Department are found in 4 buildings on campus. The Department graduates approximately 400 BA, 45 Master's and 17 PhD recipients annually. Annually, the department generates approximately 80,000 SCHs, more than any other unit on campus; it is the rare undergraduate who does not take at least one course in this department. No department on campus has a broader impact on our undergraduates. The total budget is approximately \$8M (annual).

The review team observed signs of "hard work, excellence and enterprise in the face of limited resources" but also noted that, "there are stories to be told of inertia, defeatism and indecisiveness in the Department about defining itself to itself, let alone to outsiders." The core of the problem with the Department has not seen itself as the primary determinant of success. Governance and administration have not been as strong as is needed. Departmental faculty meetings are rare and *ad hoc*, a condition noted by several faculty and one generally recognized as a significant contributor to a lack of cohesion and common vision. Cohesion and common vision, at least within major programs, is essential if the department is to deliver the best it is capable of to its students, faculty and the University.

The faculty role in governance has devolved to an executive committee of elected representatives elected for one year terms. The EC does not include individuals charged with major administrative responsibility for academic programs (such as the undergraduate major and graduate studies). At the time of the site-visit, the Department had been in the process of revising the undergraduate major, but simply had not made critical choices. This inability resulted in stasis that would likely still exist had the review not taken place and the Dean, Divisional Dean and Acting Chair responded as they have.

The major task facing the Department of English is to invent (actually adopt, as this is the norm in strong departments across the University) a culture of active faculty participation in departmental governance while maintaining a collegial and supportive atmosphere. It must also replace the present system of accountability that relies on "course load" as a unit of measure with a system that more accurately describes activity and includes some method of conversion that allows reasonable accurate estimation of a sum reflective of overall faculty effort devoted to its approved goals. [This effort is underway across the humanities under the leadership of Divisional Dean Michael Halleran]. In this effort, the School of Public Health and Community Medicine might be looked to as an example. That system has evolved over many years to award state salary support for a variety of faculty activities in a unit that has vanishingly scarce state salary dollars.

Specific issues and suggestions identified during the review follow.

Faculty

1. Morale is clearly a problem. Eleven faculty, "an entire generation of outstanding scholars," in the words of the review team, have been lost in the past three academic years. While losses might be attributed to salary discrepancies and the lack of full matching responses from the University as competitive offers are received, other Departments in the Humanities have similar inequities without the retention problem. Two reasons seem to be contributory. The first is governance as described above. Faculty seem to have little feeling of ownership in the department or its programs. Such a culture is completely out of line with the university principle of shared governance and suggests that the need to

recognize the principle as a duty of faculty, not a prerogative to be exercised at their discretion. A shared view of the future is perhaps the most important single characteristic of successful departments. In the view of the review team, "many difficulties [are] self-inflicted."

2. The literature group was seen as the "epicenter of [the] crisis of confidence." This has historically been a strength of the department, but has suffered the most from the departure of faculty, the majority of whom have gone to strong programs in places such as Duke, Michigan and NYU. It has become clear that the UW is seen as a prime recruiting ground.
3. The Department has recruited outstandingly well but has not been able to retain faculty. There has not been a promotion from associate professor to professor in five years, although there are 19 associate professors in the Department. This has been suggested to be dispiriting to Assistant Professors. The Department needs to ensure that it is taking advantage of the range of accomplishment and contribution allowed by the University Handbook in considering this condition.
4. Faculty losses do not appear to be a simple money problem (although the salary situation certainly contributed to each loss). Lack of communication with the Department has led to faculty losses both to other departments here at UW and to other Universities.
5. A means of recognizing and announcing faculty accomplishment is needed.
6. Senior faculty have been allowed to redirect effort to other programs. This practice needs to be carefully rethought with regard to the impact on the Department of English.
7. Several faculty seem to be "anachronistically rigid," in the words of the review team. The team advised the Department to choose to live productively with ideological difference; a value at the heart of academic discourse if not civility itself. The junior faculty seem to be performing well in this regard. Thought should be given to empowering this group to overcome paralysis in areas such as curricular revision.

Undergraduate Program

1. The recent paralysis has been addressed by interim chair Richard Dunn, but the process is not complete. It is clear that the Department needs to abandon old arguments and divisions and complete the implementation of a new undergraduate curriculum.
2. The Graduate School Council and the review team both endorsed the development of large introductory courses taught by senior faculty.
3. There needs to be a better system of deciding upon what courses are available at any given time to ensure efficient access, academically appropriate sequencing and intellectual challenge consistent with the course level. Allowing faculty to choose what courses to teach and when seems not to be serving the needs of students.

Graduate Program

1. In the discussion with the Graduate School Council, the size of the graduate program was described as being driven by the need for TAs and a desire to ensure that demand for seminars will ensure the opportunity to teach them. Since graduate students with doctoral aspirations enter with the hope that their degree will lead to academic employment and the Department sees the academy as the primary employer of their PhD graduates, it seems heartless that more thought is not given to matching supply with demand.

2. Approximately 22% of graduate students were not supported at the time of the review, although virtually all could expect support at some point in their career, usually for several years. Greater assurance of support would diminish anxiety among graduate students considerably. Entry should be matched more closely with support. Greater thought also should be given to the progression of teaching assignments to allow the TA to grow and experience a variety of classroom environments.
3. A relatively small fraction of the faculty was reported to devote consistent effort on the behalf of their graduate advisees, with many of the others looking upon graduate education as an overburden. If this is the case, it is one more argument to decrease the size of the graduate program.
4. There is a lack of structure in MA and PhD programs, which leads to rudderless students. It was suggested that consideration be given to requiring specific foundation courses within the MA in literature. It was noted that the lack of definite milestones and a target timeline makes it hard to remove students that are not progressing, yet another reason for poor morale among students.

Leadership

Shawn Wong is to be commended for many accomplishments. His “assistant professors benevolent society,” with recently tenured faculty as “emeriti,” has successfully eased the transition of newly recruited assistant professors. Shawn has tapped into the energy of this cohort and undoubtedly has made them feel connected. However, despite this effort, some junior faculty have lost their closest mentors with faculty departures. Richard Dunn has done an admirable job since the review to implement needed changes and to attempt to invigorate the department and address the most pressing problems, such as curricular reform. Feuds that have existed in the past among factions seem to have dissipated.

However, the problems of direction, morale and paralysis in the face of a compelling need to adapt to present circumstances (let alone to anticipate new challenges and opportunities) suggest that senior faculty simply do not see themselves as leaders and that none is generally recognized by his/her colleagues as the natural next Chair. The absence of consensus on many issues, the absence of a sense that the Department is the only entity that can make life better for itself and its students, the magnitude of the cultural shift that is required and the absence of an individual currently within the department generally recognized as capable of the task leaves no alternative to attracting an outstanding scholar and leader from outside the Department as the next chair.

The next chair will have to develop a consensus on departmental goals and how they will be attained. Governance will have to be reconstructed, perhaps using the executive committee more as a “Chair’s Cabinet” to focus issues for faculty discussion. The appropriate group might include as *ex officio* members directors of specific programs (undergraduate studies, expository writing, creative writing and graduate studies) and should employ overlapping limited terms of, for the sake of discussion, three years. The Department will have to give very serious and careful thought to how it will define itself to those outside the Department so as to compel investment in what will become an outstanding department. Choices regarding the focus of the Department must be part of this process; it is unreasonable to hope to cover the entire intellectual waterfront that might be included in a department of English. At some point, the issue of reassigning some responsibilities (perhaps writing) outside the Department or constituting some portion of the present department as an independent entity should be addressed. At the time of the review there was a feeling that the Department might be

defeated by its current size – that good ideas get lost and that new initiatives run out of steam.

The Chair clearly will need the support of the College and University administration to be able to demonstrate to colleagues that life will improve if the faculty successfully addresses those problems that can be addressed only by faculty. Additional investment in the Department should depend upon the Department meeting agreed upon milestones. These should include progress on the updating of the undergraduate curriculum, improved graduate student mentoring or a system for identifying those who would prefer not to participate as mentors, and a system for achieving broad consensus on issues of departmental direction. Milestones should be developed in discussions between the Department and the College and University administrations. Administration at both the College and University level should make their expectations for the Department clear and should also make clear what the Department should expect upon attainment of milestones. Senior recruitments will be required in addition to junior hires. Careful thought must be given to retention to avoid the deflation of spirit that comes from attracting and developing outstanding junior faculty only to have them recruited away by other universities. The Department must seek senior faculty with a spirit of cohesion and a commitment to the development of Departmental cohesion. The current junior faculty may well be the most able to identify such individuals. The Department must carefully choose the areas on which it will focus and may have to abandon others.

cc: Lee L. Huntsman, Interim President, Office of the President
David B. Thorud, Acting Provost, Office of the Provost
David Hodge, Dean, College of Arts and Sciences
Michael Halleran, Divisional Dean for Arts and Humanities,
College of Arts and Sciences
John Slattery, Associate Dean for Academic Programs, The Graduate School
Richard Dunn, Professor and Chair, Department of English
Members of the Review Committee
Graduate School Council
Augustine McCaffery, Assistant to the Dean