Department of English, University of Hawai'i at Hilo
External Reviewer's Report
Submitted by Professor Ernest Stromberg, California State University Monterey Bay
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As part of the English Department at the University of Hawai'i at Hilo's program review, I was invited to serve as the external reviewer. The basis for this invitation and my qualifications to serve in this capacity include a Ph.D. in English, a record of presentations and publications in the field, and over ten years employment in faculty and administrative capacities at California State University Monterey Bay, a "peer" institution to the University of Hawai'i at Hilo.

My review of the English Department included but was not limited to an examination of the following items:

- Department's self-study
- Data on Department, College, and University enrollment histories
- Data on faculty workload
- FTE and Student Hours served by the Department
- Department budget and resource allocations
- Faculty CVs
- Responses to the Department Alumni Survey
- Program learning outcomes
- Evidence of assessment of student learning
- Samples of student work
- Representative examples of course syllabi

In addition to an analysis of the data and evidence listed above, I spent January 20 and January 21 on the University of Hawai'i at Hilo campus meeting with Department faculty, students and alumni, support staff, and University administrators; attending portions of five different class sessions; and reviewing on campus resources.

This report will primarily consider and respond to the following elements:

- Curricular breadth and depth commensurate with the expectations for student learning
- Relationship of the program's curriculum to the current state of the discipline
- Systematic assessment of student learning
- Program improvement based on assessments of student learning.
- Distribution of the program faculty's expertise required to deliver the degree program.
- Balance of tenure line faculty and lecturers
- Student Satisfaction
- Suggestions for improvement

- Adequacy of the program's resources to deliver it major and service commitments and make needed improvements

- **Curricular breadth and depth and relationship to the current state of the discipline**

Members of the Department and the University of Hawai'i at Hilo can and should feel deservedly proud of the accomplishments of the English Department. The English Department provides a major that strikes an impressive balance between course offerings in the traditional canon of British and American literature and cutting edge curriculum in such areas as graphic novels, literature and the environment, film studies, and Queer literature. Additionally, the Department in its recent program revision has made the study of the literature of Hawai'i a core requirement. This last item, given the location of the Department and the University of Hawai'i at Hilo's articulated commitment to honoring and furthering the unique cultural traditions of the Hawaiian Islands, is especially noteworthy and to be lauded. This requirement change significantly contributes to making an English degree at the University of Hawai'i at Hilo distinctive and holds the potential to connect the Department more closely with the local community. The Department, in collaboration with the Linguistics program, offers a very successful certificate in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL). Furthermore, the Department provides a robust curriculum in creative writing and has recently developed a certificate in creative writing. The certificate in creative writing, *should it be adequately supported and resourced by the University*, will provide an opportunity for English majors and non-majors to further develop their creative capacities and their skills as writers. It will also provide another platform for the Department and the University to further serve the local community via public readings by local authors and educational opportunities for members of the community.

In addition to offering a major that is rich, diverse, and fully aligned with national and international directions in the field, the English Department makes among the most important contributions of all academic units on the campus to the lower division learning experience of students at the University of Hawai'i at Hilo. Most clearly, this comes in the form of the first year composition courses (English 100 and English 100T) provided by the Department. These two courses serve more students than any other course at the University. Beyond explicitly and effectively facilitating the development of the students' skills in written communication, information literacy, and critical thinking (Three of the five "core competencies" identified by WASC), these courses, in the absence of a University wide required first year seminar, operate de facto as students' introduction to the university. Indeed, as the administration has already recognized, English 100 and English 100T serve a pivotal role in determining and anticipating student retention and future academic success. The recent appointment of a faculty member from the English Department to role of Director of Composition indicates that the Department and the University appreciate the need for a coherent and consistent curriculum in English 100 and 100T. However, it is not clear that the position of Director of Composition, as currently

configured and funded, has the authority or resources to assure the desired coherence and consistency across sections of the two courses. It is imperative that the University provide the need resources in the form of funding and course releases to support the work of this extremely critical position. Beyond English 100 and 100T, the Department offers the highest percentage of the University's required Writing Intensive (WI) courses, including courses specifically designed to meet the needs of students in other majors.

Based on the evidence of faculty responsibilities and workloads, classroom observations, listings of faculty publications and presentations, the alumni survey, and interviews with current English majors, the greatest strength of the program is its faculty. As one student notes in a survey response, the English Department consists of "caring faculty members who are dedicated to fostering students' academic and personal growth." The Department is currently comprised of four tenured faculty (More to be said on this number later), three full-time instructors, and, eight lecturers. Full-time faculty provide critical leadership to the campus at the departmental, college, and university level. English Department faculty are clearly valuable institutional colleagues. Given their teaching and service commitments, the list of recent faculty publications and academic presentations is nothing short of astounding. The faculty continue to make important contributions to their field and clearly remain abreast of current developments in the discipline.

Reports in the alumni survey, interviews with current students, and direct observations of faculty teaching provide clear and compelling evidence that the faculty in the English Department are exemplary teachers, adept at applying effective pedagogical practices. Students and former students are effusive in their praise of the faculty, both in terms of their classroom experiences and in terms of the direct and often individualized support they receive from faculty. Faculty have taken students to local, national, and international academic conferences, provided numerous directed independent study opportunities, and supported students in extracurricular activities such as the English Club and several student publications. The non-tenured/tenure track faculty deserve equal appreciation and commendation for providing excellent classroom instruction and for *donating* tremendous service contributions to the Department and the University. The latter contribution, while certainly admirable is also highly problematic. By contract, non-tenured/track faculty are employed to provide classroom instruction. The fact that instructors serve in multiple forums beyond classroom instruction reflects both the dearth of tenure line faculty and their commendable dedication of the instructors. However, it is not a situation that bodes well for the long term health of the Department and may ultimately prove to be a liability to the University.

- **Systematic assessment of student learning**

The Department has developed sophisticated assessment rubrics and procedures for English 100 and English 100/T. The emphasis on skills in Information Literacy and Written Communication aligns with WASC's focus on these as core competencies. The Department was successful in its assessment efforts in engaging the participation of 73 readers from within the English Department and from outside the Department. The process

was robust, yielding significant data and demonstrating the Department's commitment to systematic assessment of student learning in their lower division GE courses.

Based on the results of recent assessments of student learning, the Department has implemented a "reading diagnostic" and is exploring the development of additional curricula to facilitate instruction in critical reading. The Department has also placed greater emphasis on the final research paper in order to give greater attention to students' development of information literacy. The Department is also moving to further standardize the curriculum of English 100 and English 100/T to assure greater consistency and coherence across sections. These decisions and curricular changes all demonstrate the Department's responsiveness to the results of assessment of student learning and are significant efforts to "close the loop" in the assessment cycle.

In regards to assessment of student learning in the major, the Department has recently conducted assessment of Written Communication and Oral Communication. The findings have indicated that students, overall, are performing at or above expectations in these areas at or near graduation. These findings align with what current students and alumni report as among the most important skills they develop as English majors. The Department also conducted an assessment of reading skills in the major and determined that more direct instruction on the reading of academic sources is needed.

The English Department describes its Major Learning Outcomes (MLOs) in terms of what might equally be considered as Institutional Learning Outcomes (ILOs). The alignment between the curriculum offered by the Department and the learning outcomes of Written Communication, Critical Thinking, and Information Literacy is clear and appropriate. This alignment illustrates the central position of the English Department in facilitating students' fulfillment of what WASC considers to be critical ILOs.

At the same time, this program review provides an opportunity for members of the Department to consider what learning outcomes are distinctive to an English degree at the University of Hawai'i at Hilo. For example, in the Department's Mission Statement, "cultural awareness" is identified as something students will develop in the program. If this is central to the degree program, the Department would do well to explore the specific ways students come to understand what cultural awareness means and how the program might measure student achievement in developing this learning outcome. I would urge the Department to devote deliberative time to exploring what learning experiences and outcomes are critical and unique to an English degree at the University of Hawai'i at Hilo.

- **Distribution of the program faculty's expertise required to deliver the degree program.**

The Department is stretched extremely thin in terms of its capacity to deliver the degree program as articulated in the catalog. Many of the students surveyed indicate that the greatest weakness in the program is its inability to deliver in a timely manner the array of upper division courses they desire and rightfully anticipate being able to take. While the current faculty have the requisite expertise to deliver most if not all of the existing

curriculum, the limited number of tenured and tenure track faculty results in faculty having either to develop additional expertise to cover courses or the courses not being offered or at best offered infrequently. The dedication of the faculty to their students can be evidenced in the excessive number of directed study or independent study experiences offered. However, directed study should be offered to meet exceptional circumstances or needs and not the norm that it currently is for the English Department.

- **Balance of tenure line faculty and lecturers**

According to the data provided as part of the Department's self-study, the number of tenured or tenure track faculty has declined from 8 in 2005 to the current 4. While the number of majors has fluctuated over that period, there has not been a corresponding 50% decline in majors or FTE served that might help to explain this reduction in tenured and tenure track faculty. From an outside perspective, these numbers are astounding and dismaying. This data helps explain and justify why some members of the Department perceive that the administration of the University of Hawai'i at Hilo fails to adequately appreciate the value of the English major and the significant contributions made by the Department to the University as a whole. The balance of tenure line faculty to instructors and lecturers is out of balance (4 Tenure line, 3 Instructors, and 8 Lecturers). While non-tenure line faculty are highly competent and dedicated professionals, by contract they cannot be expected to provide the expertise, service, and commitment needed for a program to thrive, grow, and evolve. Student complaints about the failure of the Department to offer listed courses in a timely and consistent fashion and the excessive number of directed study experiences offered can clearly be linked to the dramatic decline in the number of tenure line faculty. I would encourage the faculty to work with University administration on clarification of the justifications and data required to support a request to recruit additional tenure line faculty. Clearly, *the FTE served by the Department and the number of majors justify additional tenure line faculty.* At the very minimum, in a return to the 2005 numbers, the Department should seek to have 8 tenure line faculty. The status quo is simply not sustainable.

- **Student Satisfaction**

Based on a review of the alumni survey, feedback from matriculating students, and conversations with students while visiting the campus, my assessment of student satisfaction with the program is mixed. On the very positive side, students and alumni express a deep appreciation for the quality of instruction provided, the feeling of community they experience or experienced as English majors, the clear dedication of faculty to their experiences both within the classroom and beyond, and for the extracurricular learning opportunities supported by the English Department. As noted above, however, many current and recent graduates express frustration at the Department's inability to offer the breadth and depth of courses promised by listings in the catalog. Students appreciate that this is not a result of choice by the Department and its faculty but reflects the lack of resources allotted the Department. As one student notes, "As UH Hilo students, we were slightly dissatisfied with our English program in that it failed to

offer the resources of other schools due to its budgetary restrictions." In sum, the students are highly appreciative and satisfied with the faculty and their classroom learning experiences in the major and dissatisfied with the Department's inability to fulfill its potential in terms of the diversity of courses and learning experiences regularly offered.

- **Suggestions for improvement**

While there is never any program that would assert it is adequately funded, the budget situation for the English Department is particularly dire. Given that faculty are currently stretched to the limit to maintain the quality of the program with existing resources and that there are few resource neutral changes a program can implement, I am especially cautious in making the following suggestions. In making these recommendations I realize that while some of these suggestions may not require additional revenue, *they all require faculty time and energy which is currently at a premium in the English Department.*

Curricular Collaboration: The Department would be well served to expand on its already established pattern of curricular collaboration with other academic units. For example, currently English 285: Intro to News Writing & Report is also cross-listed as Communication 285. This is a wonderful example of academic units combining resources to meet needs in each program. However, at the upper division, the parallel course, COM 385: Advanced Media Writing is not cross-listed as an English offering. Offering ENG/COM 385 would provide an additional opportunity for English majors interested in developing their ability to write in different genres. Similarly, the Communication program offers COM 365: Modern American Cinema. This course, too, seems like a potential offering for English majors interested in the study and analysis of film. I mention these two courses and the Communication program simply because there is already a precedent of collaboration and to illustrate the possibility of additional partnerships. I appreciate that such collaborations require negotiation, the goodwill of both contributing programs, and possibly compromises, but in the absence of additional resources and in light of student demand for more diversity in the curriculum, the development of more shared courses provides, from the standpoint of administration, a revenue neutral opportunity for curricular expansion and increased interdisciplinarity.

Marketing the program: The English Department is, quite simply, a treasure, albeit, a not fully appreciated treasure, within the University of Hawai'i at Hilo. The Department provides far and away the bulk of the University's lower division curriculum in written communication; it provides a degree major clearly successful in providing students with the skills and dispositions required for post-graduation success; it has developed strong and important relationships with community educational partners; it has taken a lead role in campus wide assessment efforts; and consists of professionally accomplished faculty. In the self-study, the Department expresses a concern that the University's promotional and curricular emphasis has shifted to the STEM fields. To the degree this interpretation is accurate at the University of Hawai'i at Hilo, I cannot say. However, it would be consistent with trends experienced at many other publicly funded institutions of higher education. One result is that the Humanities as a whole is now tasked to do more self-promotion. My recommendation is for the Department, in collaboration with existing institutional offices

and resources, to expand on ways to market itself on campus, to the community, and most importantly to potential students.

Service learning/internships: I encourage the Department to look for ways to provide majors with extracurricular professional experiences such as internships and service learning opportunities. The University has an Office of Applied Learning Experiences (ALEX) that may be able to provide the logistical support required to develop and offer major-specific internships and service learning opportunities. Internships and service learning have been identified by the AAC&U as "high-impact educational practices." Students within the major have and are developing skills valued by members of the community. Internships and service learning would enrich students' educational experiences and cultivate relationships between the Department and the local community.

Sunset courses: The list of English courses in the catalog is rich and diverse. However, the program self-study and student feedback indicate that the Department is not able to offer all of the listings on a regular and consistent basis. While it is noted that the Department did sunset "obsolete courses" from the catalog in 2008 and 2009, as part of the Department's ongoing reflections on its priorities and future directions, a further review of the catalog and additional culling of those courses that may no longer align with the vision and/or available expertise of the Department may be in order. I make this suggestion both as a means to assist the Department in clarifying its focus and priorities and as a way of accurately communicating to students and potential students what they may reasonably anticipate being offered.

Senior Capstone: Another AAC&U identified "high-impact educational practice" is a culminating experience. There are a variety of models for this experience, some more resource intensive than others. I encourage the Department to develop a model that serves the needs of their students and that can be offered in the current economic and staffing context.

Assess the Department's Lower Division University Commitments: Without a clear understanding of the funding model at the University of Hawai'i at Hilo, I cannot recommend the appropriate number of sections of ENG 100 and ENG 100T that the Department should offer. However, with ENG 100 and ENG 100T courses making up 35 – 40% of all classes offered by the Department, coupled with the high number of 200 level courses designed to serve students in other majors, it is clear that the Department's service courses take a disproportionate percentage of the Department's budget and reduce its ability to offer upper division courses for English majors. The result is the excessive number of directed studies offered. To the extent possible, the Department should further prioritize the major curriculum to assure that the needs of English majors are not sacrificed in serving campus wide needs.

Professional and Scientific Writing: Given that a faculty recruitment effort is under way to hire an instructor to teach "scientific and technical writing," the Department should explore the development of a concentration in the major or a certificate in this area, or at the least further developing this areas part of the major.

Resource the Director of Composition: The importance of English 100 and English 100T to the University in terms of student preparation and retention cannot be overstated. The University can and should demonstrate its recognition and appreciation of the pivotal role played by these courses by providing additional support for the Director's position.

- **Adequacy of the program's resources to deliver it major and service commitments and make significant improvements**

As the Department's self-study indicates and the evidence examined confirms, the English Department is managing to provide an exemplary curriculum in written communication at the lower division and to provide a high quality learning experience for students in the major. However, they are doing this with inadequate funding, inappropriately volunteered labor, and without the means to fully meet students' expectations or to develop the program in important directions.

- The current resources severely limit the Department's ability to offer in a timely and consistent fashion the robust array of courses listed in the catalog.
- The 50% decline in tenure line faculty over the past ten years without a corresponding decline in majors or FTE is alarming and significantly impairs the ability of the Department to meet the curricular needs of students in the major and to further develop the program.
- The recommendations for improvement listed above, while not ostensibly requiring additional direct budgetary allocations, all require the time and labor of faculty. Currently faculty time and labor are stretched so thin as to make it extremely challenging to fully implement the recommendations.

Concluding Remarks

The Department of English is comprised of talented and dedicated faulty who have developed and maintained a program that makes impressive and valuable contributions to the University at large while providing a rich, supportive, and rigorous learning experience for its majors. At the same time, the current state of affairs is not sustainable, nor is it fair to the students or the faculty members who serve them. The Department is truly stretched to the breaking point in terms of being able to continue to fulfill its mission and service without more resources.

The AAC&U, of which the University of Hawai'i at Hilo is a member institution, has defined "essential learning outcomes" for a liberal education in the twenty-first-century. Among these outcomes are the following:

Knowledge of Human Cultures and the Physical and Natural World

- Through study in the sciences and mathematics, social sciences, humanities, histories, languages, and the arts

Intellectual and Practical Skills, Including

- Inquiry and analysis
- Critical and creative thinking
- Written and oral communication
- Quantitative literacy
- Information literacy
- Teamwork and problem solving

Personal and Social Responsibility, Including

- Civic knowledge and engagement—local and global
- Intercultural knowledge and competence
- Ethical reasoning and action
- Foundations and skills for lifelong learning

Integrative and Applied Learning, Including

- Synthesis and advanced accomplishment across general and specialized studies (https://www.aacu.org/leap/essential-learning-outcomes)

The English Department at the University of Hawai'i at Hilo can confidently claim responsibility for the teaching and learning required for the development and fulfillment of nearly all of these AAC&U learning outcomes and in particular "knowledge of human cultures," "inquiry and analysis," "critical and creative thinking," "written communication," "information literacy," "intercultural knowledge and competence," and "ethical reasoning and action." In support of these "essential learning outcomes" and the vision of LEAP, the University of Hawai'i at Hilo, as a member of the AAC&U, is charged with the responsibility to provide the resources required by the English Department to fulfill its critical contributions to that vision.