

**Internal Academic Review Committee
Report on the Review of the Department of English**

Department of English

The Department of English is recognized nationally and internationally for the quality of its teaching, research and scholarship. It is home to energetic and committed faculty and staff who have demonstrated a sense of purpose and extraordinary efficiency, despite severe financial constraints. The Department attracts very good students who show commitment and devotion to their work.

The reports highlight the dilemma, faced not only by Queen's, but also by all departments in the English-speaking world, of finding the appropriate balance in the curriculum between literary history and contemporary literature. While the reviewers praise the Department for its research accomplishments, they also encourage the unit to create a more dynamic research environment. In particular, reviewers suggest expanding opportunities for graduate students to engage in research endeavours, such as participating in research groups and working as research assistants. Having reviewed the reports of both the consultants and the Internal Review team, the IARC makes the following recommendations.

Major Recommendations

1. CURRICULUM: The IARC commends English for its recent efforts to enhance and refine its undergraduate program by addressing the concerns identified by students, External Consultants and Review Team members. Specifically, the reports had recommended a review of the English "gateway" course to ensure a balanced presentation of contemporary and historic literature and an appraisal of the curriculum content of upper year seminar courses.

The IARC recommends that the Department of English continue its curriculum review process with the full participation of its students and faculty members.

RESEARCH CULTURE: The IARC congratulates the Department on its reputation for research excellence and acknowledges the independent nature of the pursuit of scholarship, which is normally associated with the field of English. Nonetheless, the IARC supports the recommendation of the reviewers that efforts be made to raise the visibility of the research culture within the Department and foster graduate student participation in the research programs of the unit.

Where warranted, the IARC recommends that the Department seek external funding to support research and to provide stipends and collaborative research opportunities for graduate students.

2. ADMINISTRATION: The External Consultants and the Review Team articulated the need for the Department to establish a system for sharing administrative responsibilities within the unit, cultivate leadership and strengthen the “service ethic” of the unit. The Reports suggest a review of duties associated with various departmental service roles and the development of succession plans to ensure smooth and predictable transitions.

The IARC recommends that the Department of English, with guidance from the Faculty of Arts and Science, take steps to establish and coordinate mechanisms that encourage faculty service to the Department.

Outcomes of the Review

Response submitted by the Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Science and the Head of the Department of English

Outcomes of the Internal Academic Review of the Department of English Joint Response from the Department of English and the Faculty of Arts and Science

Recommendation 1

Since receiving the recommendations of the internal and external IAR assessors, the Department of English has been actively engaged in addressing the concerns expressed about its “gateway” course, English 110. We have revised our *English 110 Guidelines* and we have created the new

administrative post of English 110 Coordinator, whose mandate will include coordinating resources and organizing and facilitating the teaching of writing skills. The Department is currently offering the maximum number of upper year seminar courses in Contemporary Literature for which we have faculty resources. A regular appointment in Contemporary Literature would enable further expansion along these lines, and remains a hiring priority.

Recommendation 2

Since the time of the review, the Department has been successful in four new SSHRC Standard Research Grant applications, all of which include funding for graduate student assistance. Study groups, particularly the Eighteenth-Nineteenth Century Study Group, are thriving, as is the institution of the Special Topics Presentation for PhD students, now in its third year. Finally, the Department will be hosting two international conferences in 2005/06, both of which will involve the participation of graduate students.

Recommendation 3

While noting that some of the concerns expressed about the delegation of service responsibilities were occasioned by extraordinary circumstances at the time of the review, the Department is nonetheless taking steps to disseminate departmental service more equitably within the unit. For example, some new official positions, subordinate to those of the departmental officers, have been created, including those of 110 Coordinator, Graduate Placement Officer, and Supervisor of Graduate Applications. Advance planning will begin in 2005/06 to prepare for transitions in the three major departmental offices, which will take place in July 2007. The Head and the Dean's office will continue to closely monitor the service contributions of department members in the annual review process.

Follow-up on these recommendations and issues will take place in the annual budget and staffing strategy meetings between the Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Science and the Vice-Principal (Academic).

**Report of the Internal Review Team for the
Department of English
Internal Academic Review**

Queen's University

By

Ms. Diane Bedrossian, Life Sciences undergraduate student

Dr. Frank Burke, Film Studies

Mr. Michael Helfield, Classics graduate student

Prof. Elizabeth Kauffmann, Nursing

Ms. Wendy Lloyd, Human Resources

Dr. Kevin Munhall, Psychology

Dr. Rena Upitis, Education (chair)

March 2004

Report of the Internal Academic Review Team on the Department of English, Queen's University

Introduction

Process

At the invitation of the Vice-Principal (Academic), the members listed on the front of this report agreed to take part in the Internal Academic Review of the Department of English. Accordingly, the Internal Academic Review Team (herein referred to as the Review Team) for the Department of English was formed in August 2003.

The Review Team began by examining the three volumes of the English Department Self-Study: namely, the Analysis (Volume I), Appendices (Volume II), and Curriculum Vitae (Volume III). The Review Team also examined and discussed the Senate documents and guidelines for conducting internal academic reviews at Queen's, and the Guidelines for External Consultants and Review Teams on Equity Issues. At our first meeting in September, we discussed procedural issues and conducted our first examination of the various documents. After taking some time to review the documents in detail, we met again in November. As a result of that meeting, the Review Team identified the issues that we felt would be most pertinent to the review.

The external consultants came to Queen's in early January 2004. At that time, several members of the Review Team attended the meetings of undergraduate and graduate students. In addition, the Review Team as a whole met with the external consultants. During that meeting, we were able to raise issues with the external consultants that we thought required clarification or discussion, as well as to hear the impressions of the external consultants. Several members of the Review Team also took part in a meeting with members of the Department of English in early February. After receiving the Report from the External Consultants in late February, along with some clarifying comments from the Head of the Department of English, the Review Team met once again to discuss the consultants' report and to discuss the elements that would be contained in the report of the Review Team.

Overall Findings

The Review Team wholeheartedly agrees with the view of the external consultants regarding the high quality of the English Department. The consultants recognized that the Queen's English Department is known both nationally and internationally for the quality of its students and the impact of the research and scholarship carried out in the Department. The report from the external consultants details reasons for their assessment, as well as noting several areas for improvement. Indeed, the Review Team felt that the report was a particularly strong one, and many of the points made in our own report simply reinforce the observations made by the external consultants. In addition, throughout the report, we comment on the Queen's context where possible.

In the first section of their report (*Quality Summary*), the consultants identified a number of key issues. In terms of the comparator universities, we agree with the consultants who identify the English departments at Alberta, Toronto, UBC, Western as more appropriate choices than those offered by the Department of English, despite differences in such factors as size and resources.

The Review Team also agrees that there is a heavy service burden on faculty members at mid-career level, and indeed, at the early-career level as well, as will become evident in a later section of the report.

Although the external consultants indicate that the teaching load of 2.5 is "viewed as uncompetitive", this teaching load is, in fact, in keeping with teaching expectations in other cognate departments. With the exception of Sociology and Politics, both of which have a teaching load of 2.0, faculty members in other departments such as Drama, Film Studies, and Classics all carry a teaching load of 2-5 courses. More important than teaching load, *per se*, is the observation of the consultants that the quality of teaching is exceptionally high. This accords with the evidence contained in the Self-Study regarding student feedback, and with the experience certain Review Team members have had with the Department and its students.

The external consultants also indicated that they felt that "this was a department under strain, in need of more resources". We agree that this is the case. In fact, one would be hard pressed to identify any department or unit at Queen's that was not operating under strain after many years of fiscal constraint. This strain is not limited to faculty members; the external consultants also highlight the strain felt by secretarial staff, a point to which we will return to in the next section of our report.

Some of the other issues aptly raised in the Self-Study and echoed by the external consultants as worthy of attention include the over reliance on adjunct (contract) teaching, the need for new appointments in several key areas, the need to re-think the philosophical basis and organization of the undergraduate curriculum, and the need for improvements to the physical plant. We will comment on those issues where we feel we can add to the already impressive report by the external consultants. However, we feel that certain issues such as strategic hiring are best left to the Department of English, guided by the suggestions of the external consultants and other colleagues who are working in the discipline.

Administration

The Review Team considers the department's administrative group as one with considerable strength of commitment and skill, but one that is also operating under various strains and under the pressure of frequent transitions. At this time the three administrative positions, Department Head, Graduate Coordinator and Undergraduate Coordinator, are all held by early- or mid-career faculty members. There are no Full Professors serving in any of the three administrative positions.

One of the positions that caused some initial concern for the Review Team and for external consultants was that of Undergraduate Coordinator, where a turnover of five faculty members occurred over the course of four years. However, it would appear that the frequent turnover was due to a number of predictable events occurring in the course of academic careers such as sabbaticals and appointments to administrative positions in the wider university sector. However, it should be noted that this position entails a heavy service load, a point made in the Self-Study as well (Volume I, p. 113). The position commands considerable responsibility to be directed to curricular matters, registration, approving admissions to the honors program, and academic counseling. Responsibilities of the position also include interfacing with faculty members regarding student issues and reporting to departmental meetings and committees in the wider university sector. It is possible that another member or group can assume some of the tasks currently embedded in this position. For example, we understand that the Undergraduate Coordinator also holds the position Computer Representative/Computer Officer. In most departments at Queen's, this interfacing position between faculty and the Information Technology Service is held by a staff person. A more serious issue in the long term is that the service demands of the Undergraduate Coordinator position have the potential to encroach on time needed to establish a program of scholarship and research, particularly when the position is held by a pre-tenured member of faculty.

Staff

The three staff members form a strong support network for the department despite their limited number. The consultants noted that the full scope of tasks they are asked to perform was not fully

listed in the report. It was clear in the Review Team's meeting with the Department that faculty acknowledge the contribution these people are making and hold it in high regard. Although the committee recognizes the scope and breadth of the responsibilities carried out by these staff members, the present configuration of job responsibilities makes it highly unlikely that a reevaluation of the three staff positions would result in any upgrades accompanied by higher levels of compensation. Instead, it is recommended that funding for another continuing or term support staff position be added to the base budget of the Department. This would help ease the workload of the current staff. Supplementary assistance may also be needed at peak times of academic administrative activity.

Teaching and the Undergraduate Curriculum

The Review Team feels that, for the most part, curriculum evaluation is best left in the hands of the external consultants, since both are English academics and none of the Review Team members currently is. We would, however, like to reiterate the comments made in the opening section regarding teaching. Even though there are issues that the Department is currently considering regarding the structure of the undergraduate curriculum, it is evident from the course outlines submitted in the Self-Study that the English faculty think deeply about pedagogy, and from the course evaluation information in the Self-Study that the quality of teaching in the Department is most impressive.

Against this background, and on the basis of our attendance at the consultants' meeting with English undergraduates and the knowledge that Review Team members from cognate departments have of literary studies, we felt the consultants' report provides an accurate description of the broad curriculum "dilemma" within not only the Queen's English department but departments throughout the English-speaking world: the need to balance literary history and tradition with an appropriate emphasis on contemporary literature. (This is of course linked to the need to present the literature of any period in a meaningful way to students of the new millennium.) The Review Team also found that the report also emphasized appropriately the Queen's English Department's integrity in addressing the dilemma.

The Review Team felt that the report rightly pointed to certain anomalies in faculty staffing and curriculum and that it effectively re-addressed these in recommendation #4. However, we found that this recommendation failed to include the issue of race and ethnicity within the curriculum, which is raised persuasively in paragraph 4 of the section on Undergraduate Curriculum. We appreciate the consultants' identification of both the "survey" vs. "special topics" issue (paragraph 5) and the problems of mounting an effective "gateway" course (i.e., English 110, paragraph 6).

We encountered one problematic moment in our reading of the Undergraduate Curriculum section in the consultants' report. It seemed curious that on the basis of a one hour meeting with students, the consultants could distinguish between more and less "serious" and "committed" students, and further, could identify the former with traditionalism and the latter with a tendency to question it. There seemed to be the implication that students who seek contemporary relevance in their courses are less serious and committed. We respectfully suggest that if this line of thought is carried forward into departmental debates on the tradition/contemporaneity issue, it could prove detrimental.

The Review Team has every confidence, based on the Self-Study of the English Department and our meeting with the Department, that the Department is well aware of the issues raised by the consultants' report and that it has, in many cases, been addressing them aggressively for quite some time. In fact, many of these matters require constant reevaluation and do not lend themselves to once-and-for-all solutions.

Graduate Programs and Research

The training of graduate students and the Department's research and scholarship are summarized in this single section because the Review Team feels strongly that key issues for both areas of the Department are linked.

The external consultants present a positive view of the productivity and quality of the Department's scholarship. The Queen's English Department has an international reputation for its research activities, and its publication rates are comparable to those of other strong English departments. Given that the Review Team was unfamiliar with many of the journals listed in the curriculum vitae of faculty members, further information was sought regarding journal reputation and acceptance rates. We were impressed by the information we received regarding the quality of the journals (and acceptance rates) in which many of the members of the Department of English have published their work. Recent hires are likely to maintain this level of scholarship. However, the Review Team and external consultants both note the loss of some of the Department's most productive scholars (e.g., Magnusson, Rasula, and Stevens). It should, however, be noted that other departments at Queen's have also lost some of their most productive scholars in recent years, pointing to a possible university-wide problem that may require a response on the part of the Queen's administration.

The first sentence of the Research and Scholarship section of the Department's Self-study document describes the department as a community of scholars, and it is this "community" that the Review Team wishes to comment on. Both the external consultants and the Review Team sensed problems in the research culture within the Department. This issue has implications for graduate training and for research funding. Each of these issues will be dealt with separately.

Graduate research mentorship within the department appears to be largely dependent on the interpersonal relationship between supervisors and their students. While this is an important facet of graduate training in the humanities, the external consultants and the Review Team felt that an equally important component was the visibility of the department's research and the formal research support system within the Department. It was not apparent to the Review Team, the external consultants, or to the graduate students who attended the review meetings, that the Department is making enough effort in this area. The establishment (or re-establishment) of active research groups and seminar series with invited speakers, and efforts to encourage interdisciplinary discussion could enrich the research environment in the Department and improve graduate training.

Regarding the role of external funding for research, some members of the Review team felt that the external funding levels were lower than might be expected. These members of the Review team felt that graduate students would benefit from success in grant applications, arguing that money could fund research assistantships to enhance graduate training as well as fund travel to conferences for students, computer resources for research, and visiting scholars. In addition, such activities might also deepen the sense of research communities or collectives that is arguably needed in this Department.

Other members of the Review Team, while concurring that the level of external funding was a matter of concern, felt that it reflected certain funding and graduate-student training factors in the field of literary studies (and to a large extent in the humanities), more than reflecting upon English Department grantsmanship. Some of these factors were also noted by English faculty during the Review Team's meeting with the Department:

- a) Many faculty members do not feel the need to seek external funding because the operating costs of much research in literature are not high.
- b) Much research in literature is traditionally individual- rather than group-oriented, and there has been a significant shift in emphasis in recent years towards the latter in ten-ns of funding initiatives on the part of granting agencies. This has created a negative climate for the pursuit of individual grants.

c) The emphasis on individual rather than group research in literary studies is part of a culture of individual authorship linked, of course, to the importance of the author in literary history. This in turn leads to the expectation that one will be responsible for every facet of the research undertaken. Co-authored work is less rewarded than individual work. Perhaps more important, single-authored work is the basis for hiring and advancement in English. Forcing either faculty or graduate into collaborative projects can be detrimental to their careers.

d) By the time literature students enter graduate school, they are already conditioned to undertake individual projects. They generally do not gain satisfaction from being coupled to an advisor's work and such coupling can even be viewed as exploitation.

The Department continues to be aggrieved over the terms of a Canada Research Chair appointment. The Review Team has no information about the specific negotiations for this appointment, but we would urge the University and Department to come to a mutually acceptable agreement.

Finally, the Review Team noted that the Department of English is one of a small number of departments at Queen's where a one-year, course-based masters program is offered. This program is important financially to the Department but also may have costs in terms of the scholarly environment. While we recognize that there are other units at Queen's offering a one-year course-based masters (Economics and Public Administration), and that this practice is not unknown in English Departments at other universities, several members of the Review Team felt that it might be wise to consider the scholarly implications of a course-based degree in the English discipline.

Infrastructure

Physical Plant

The Department is to be commended for its perseverance in dealing with the structural and aesthetic limitations of Watson Hall. While upgrades have been completed with portions of the space to house more graduate student work space and computer workstations, the physical resources are nevertheless considered inadequate for parts of the undergraduate and graduate delivery of courses. Additional space is needed if seminar classes (30 students) are to be split or if breakout groups used as a strategy to augment the interaction among class members. In Volume II (Appendices) of the Self-Study, the Department notes that strategic plans are being made to increase the presence of advancement (fund-raising). Physical resources may be one area where such plans could be directed.

Library Resources

Library resources are strong and there is a concerted effort on the part of the Department to work collaboratively with the library personnel to ensure that resources are available to serve the needs of the undergraduate and graduate program. This cooperation is to be commended

Information Technology Services

The department receives support from ITS for the basic computer services for faculty and for students through a semi-public computer lab. However there are some concerns. As noted earlier, one of the concerns is that the ITS representative is a faculty member, namely, the Undergraduate Coordinator. Another concern is that while the semi-public computer site is generally well-equipped for student use, the limited hours of operation (weekdays from 8:30 AM-4:00 PM) make it difficult to students to make full use of the facility. As well, it is noted that software programs, which may be unique to the discipline but considered valuable to support scholarly activities, are not available.

Major Recommendations

The Review Team endorses the recommendations made by the external consultants in their report, both throughout the text and in the final list of recommendations. We offer the following as our own summary of recommendations:

- To develop a comprehensive structure for administrative support in the Department, including (a) an examination of duties associated with each of the faculty and staff service positions, (b) the development of more effective succession plans, and (c) attention to the career phase of both faculty and staff members involved in service positions.
- To increase the visibility of the research culture in the Department through promoting research collectives.
- To look to increasing external funding levels both by pursuing individual grants more aggressively and by developing joint and/or interdisciplinary projects where feasible.
- To conduct a review of the Undergraduate Curriculum as recommended by the consultants, including the issues of race and ethnicity as reflected in the body of their report.
- To commit to hiring in areas of need as indicated by the Self-Study (Volume I) and the report of the external consultants.
- To continue efforts towards improving the teaching venues for undergraduate and graduate instruction.

Acknowledgements

Reviewing the work of one's colleagues is simultaneously a difficult and rewarding task. It has been our privilege to explore the workings of a Department that is not our own. We extend our thanks to members of the Department of English and to the Office of the Dean of Arts and Science for ensuring that we were provided with the documentation that we needed, and for arranging administrative support throughout the process.

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