

July 2010

To: Wayne Quirk, Provost
Tracy Pellett, AVP for Undergraduate Studies

From: Marji Morgan, Dean, College of Arts and Humanities

Re: 2009-2010 Program Review, English

c: George Drake, Chair, Department of English

I write to provide commendations, concerns and recommendations as part of the program review process for the Department of English. These remarks are based on the Program's Self-Study and the external reviewer's evaluation, and take into account college mission and resources. I have not yet had time to meet with the English department faculty about the review. I will do so early in Fall quarter. I want to take this opportunity to thank everyone involved in this review process, especially George Drake, English faculty and staff, and Dr. Susan Bennett, as I know how very time consuming the review process is for everyone involved. The Department Self-Study was outstanding, and I want to commend Chair Drake and other English faculty for their careful attention to this important document.

COMMENDATIONS

Dr. Bennett characterizes the English Department as highly productive and exemplary, and I very much agree. She offers a long list of richly deserved commendations, starting with the faculty for their productivity in scholarship and service, diversity in expertise and culture, and success in obtaining grants—a success led by Dr. Bobby Cummings who is one of the most consistently successful grant getters at CWU. Students across specializations praised faculty for their knowledge and accessibility, and expressed great appreciation for small class sizes and practical experience such as that offered in writing workshops and in the writing lab as peer tutors. Dr. Bennett noted repeatedly the benefits of the English department faculty and staff working as a team, and I think this is due, in part, to the outstanding leadership provided by Chair Drake, which Bennett praises as well. Dr. Bennett also commended the department for a curriculum that combines both a traditional approach revolving around chronological/genre/author-based courses and a more contemporary, cultural studies approach focusing on themes, theories and socio/political contexts. This balanced curriculum and the opportunity for students to specialize in literature, writing, or teaching English are right in line with national trends in departments of English across the country. In addition, I believe several things set our English department apart from others, and those include our Writing Lab, our status as a National Writing Project site, and our Lion Rock Visiting Writers Series, all of which help to strengthen ties between theory and practice in the field and to connect our program with writers and teachers from the region and beyond.

CONCERNS

Dr. Bennett discussed several concerns that are not related to her recommendations, so I will address those here in this section.

One concern was with our being sure to provide faculty with enough scholarship time, especially

considering the heavy teaching and service loads at Central. I agree that this must be a high priority, and the college and university have done several things to help in this area: more college summer research/creativity grants, more research grants funded by the Graduate Studies office, CWU has maintained a good sabbatical program, and we have tried, when possible, to be flexible with workload. I think the quarter system and 4-credit classes result in an unusually heavy teaching load in the department, as the typical load involves teaching nine different courses. It might be better if the department could move to 5-credit classes (history, philosophy and art have such classes), with one day each week being a reading or online day, to free up some time for faculty and to reduce the sheer number of courses being taught.

Dr. Bennett picked up on a number of curricular concerns voiced by students. One is the desire for more traditional grammar instruction, and I understand that the department is working on providing an additional grammar course. A second concern involved methods courses for English Ed students, many of which are taken in the College of Education where the instruction seems geared more for elementary than secondary level teachers. I will discuss this issue with the department, and suggest a meeting with appropriate College of Education faculty and staff, if necessary.

I couldn't agree more with Dr. Bennett that Chair Drake is doing an excellent job, but I have to take issue with her statement that at CWU we elect our chairs "providing little or no professional development." In our college, we have a workshop for new chairs, send every new chair to a national workshop for Chairs, and have an all-day retreat each year at which we often discuss helpful books we've all read about various issues facing department chairs. In addition, the university provides an all-day workshop each year for Chairs. We can certainly do more, and I am open to suggestions for additional things we might do to support our chairs, as I believe that the Chair position is the most difficult one at a university.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The external reviewer offered recommendations in two main areas, and I will address both below.

- 1. Advising -** In my experience, advising generates more complaints on campuses than any other single thing. Dr. Bennett suggests that students and faculty in the English Department are dissatisfied with advisement as it is currently structured. In order to respond to this dissatisfaction, I need to understand better than I do from this review what the sources of the complaints are. One thing is certain: as we streamline course offerings in the face of budget cuts, we will need to greatly improve our advising and our scheduling of classes, so that students know when classes will be offered and so we do not offer required courses in conflict with each other.

Dr. Bennett offers three models for advising, characterizing the department's model as one where students are assigned an advisor based on their specialization, with advising being an "add on" responsibility to faculty advisors' other responsibilities. I'm confused by this characterization because as far as I know, each faculty advisor in the department gets considerable teaching load reduction for doing advising. In fact, I believe there is more reassigned time for advising in the English department than for any other department in the college.

Dr. Bennett favors an advising model that gives advising responsibility for all new and transfer students in a given year to a single faculty member, who works with those students until they graduate. Each year a different faculty member takes on this responsibility without reassigned time, but rather with reduced service responsibilities in other areas. Dr. Bennett discusses the advantages of this model, and suggests that it provides students with better access to advisors and advising materials.

I look forward to discussing these various models with the department and to hearing their thoughts on what would work best for our faculty and students. My own experience tells me that several things are essential in order to have effective advising: only those faculty who enjoy doing advising do it in any formal sense, faculty advisors do advising regularly enough to be very knowledgeable about departmental/university rules and regulations, faculty advisors spend enough time doing advising to be accessible to students, and faculty advisors are given reassigned time to do advising. I also think that some collective meetings about advising and career information can cut down on the time faculty advisors need to spend with individual students.

- 2. Composition Program** - Dr. Bennett's main concern with the composition program seems to be its lack of identity, in particular its lack of full integration into the English Department, or some other segment of the university. The lack of full integration comes about mainly because the program is taught primarily by non tenure track faculty and graduate students, with tenured and tenure track faculty playing little role and having little knowledge of the program's strengths and weaknesses. Her main recommendations are that all faculty in the department be incorporated into the process of assessing the composition program, perhaps with a portfolio assessment system, and that greater attention be given to professional development connected with the composition program.

Given that the university as a whole is taking assessment of general education more seriously than it has before, Bennett's recommendation regarding assessment of composition seems very much in line with what we are in the process of doing as an institution. I will work with the English Department to ensure that all faculty are involved in the assessment of composition as well as other departmental general education courses. In addition, I believe it is important to ensure that the writing students do in composition courses is meaningful to them. One way to do this is to link composition courses to content courses, such as history or philosophy, or to teach composition to classes composed of students in a single major, such as music. I know that we had one or more composition classes this past year that were composed of music students, and the writing assignments were linked to music events and issues. My understanding is that this linking of writing to students' interests worked very well, and I believe we should do as much of this linking as possible.

I agree with Dr. Bennett that professional development for faculty is important for the composition program and can also work to bring faculty together. We have many opportunities for faculty development on campus, both at the university and college levels. In fact, now that we have a Center for the Teacher-Scholar, we have very regular faculty development activities. In addition, I know that the English Department plans to have workshops specific to departmental faculty needs, and some of those workshops, if not all, should involve everyone who teaches in the department, including graduate teaching assistants.

SUMMARY

I agree with Dr. Bennett that her two main recommendations concerning advising and the composition program will help to enhance a common vision among faculty and staff for students in the composition and English major programs. I also think that recent curricular discussions and revisions have worked to create a more coherent vision for English majors in particular. I look forward to working with the department on implementing Dr. Bennett's recommendations, and to continuing to support English department faculty, staff and students in every way I can. It is a pleasure to support such a productive and creative department.