

Western Carolina University
External Review of the English Department

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Summary of Commendations and Recommendations

The English Department at Western Carolina University is comprised of an extremely energetic, accomplished group of faculty engaged in ongoing curriculum refinement, prolific publishing, and dedicated, skillful teaching. Having accomplished a thorough review and transformation of the English curriculum since the last external review in 2007, the Department now offers its majors an education more closely calibrated toward professional outcomes beyond the crucial intellectual and cultural currencies English departments have offered traditionally, while still remaining faithful to the core values of a liberal arts education. Moreover, the Department operates within a university whose leadership is similarly committed to WCU's mission to "improve individual lives and enhance economic opportunity and community development." At the same time it is equally clear that the Department is facing significant challenges on a number of fronts.

Summary of Commendations

1. The self study is admirably clear and thorough, one of the best we've seen.
2. Dr. Laura Wright is a thoughtful and resourceful leader of the English Department; from all accounts, the Department has enjoyed strong, positive leadership for some time.
3. The faculty are student-centered educators.
4. The faculty are also exceptionally productive scholars and artists.
5. The Department is extraordinarily collegial and inclusive.
6. The Department offers courses and degree programs that clearly reflect current theory, research, and practice in English studies.
7. Outside agencies recognize the robust preparation of English Education students (c.f. the Henry Report).

Summary of Observations and Recommendations

1. Loss of the graduate TESOL program was a serious blow to the Department.
2. Course caps, especially in the composition courses, are significantly out of line with best practice recommendations.

3. The Department's ability to hire has not kept pace with the University's growth; in fact, since the last external review, the Department has lost 15 lecturer positions.
4. The office staffing is insufficient to meet the growing needs of the Department, and staff members report insufficient training and long waits to gain access to crucial systems.
5. Students have no space to congregate in the Department office area.
6. The current curriculum, while responsive to the Department's and University's prioritization of professional outcomes for graduates, may be placing too much pressure on particular courses (such as the sophomore-level survey courses).
7. There is potential to increase cohesion among graduate student TAs, and to introduce greater structure into their mentoring.
8. The Department faces challenges in its marketing, but can only broadcast its strengths through an increase in University support.
9. The time may be ripe to consider leading a WAC initiative on campus, but only given buy-in with units across the campus, and only if the Provost can allocate additional resources.
10. The success of the WCU Literary Festival suggests the opportunity for further ventures to enhance further the profile of the English Department.
11. There are opportunities to further internationalize the Department and its students through Study Abroad.
12. Faculty feel increasing pressure to perform work outside their training, such as marketing, assessment, data collection, social media, devising retention strategies, grant writing, fundraising, and others. Further, a disconnect between departmental and administration perspective has contributed to eroding Department morale.

External Review of the English Department at Western Carolina University

Commendations, Observations, and Recommendations

Commendations

Self Study

The self study produced by the Department is one of the clearest, most thorough we have seen. In addition to articulating a clear vision for the Department that places student outcomes at the center, the self-study reveals that assessment in the Department has come a long way from previous methods; the introduction to the major and capstone courses, for instance, bracket student experience and are well timed for rich data collection.

At the same time, the faculty have taken a measured and thoughtful approach to the document and have not shied away from confronting potentially uncomfortable or unwelcome facts; their candor has aided our evaluation at every turn and their warm hospitality during our visit turned business into real pleasure. But among the challenges noted in this self study are (1) the loss of 15 term positions, a circumstance which required the restructuring of freshman composition; (2) a departmental budget that has remained flat through recent years; and (3) the ongoing need for a second full-time office administrator.

Department Leadership

The Department continues to be fortunate in its leadership. Dr. Laura Wright is a thoughtful, resourceful leader; indeed, as we met with faculty during our visit, we heard a clear and consistent message that faculty both on and off the tenure track greatly respect and value Dr. Wright for her approachability, judgment, and sense of direction. She clearly cares deeply about the success of students, colleagues, the Department, and the university; further, she is perceived as fair and diligent, creative in problem-solving and ardent in her advocacy on behalf of her students, faculty, and programs.

The Department may soon face the challenge of selecting a new chair, as Dr. Wright's term of service will soon expire, though she could seek a second term. Such transitions can be disruptive and we encourage the administration to work with the Department to make the change as seamless as possible, perhaps by providing reassigned time for Dr. Wright to work with the new chair for a semester or summer leading up to the transition.

Student-centered Faculty

Faculty at all ranks are student-centered, working diligently to teach and mentor students effectively. This emphasis is clear in the self-study and became even more apparent during our meetings with students and with faculty. Students spoke of the active mentoring roles faculty play, from academic concerns to more general advice and guidance. Moreover, faculty relayed a close understanding of individual students—their travails, challenges, and aspirations.

The faculty of the English Department also distinguish themselves for their effectiveness in the classroom. Students describe their powerful esteem for a faculty who consistently challenge them to engage with language and literature at structural, historical, theoretical, aesthetic, and emotional levels. They also describe a curricular experience that transforms their professional outlook and personal, intellectual profile. In testimony to the experience they have as undergraduates, many of those who achieve the B.A. return as candidates for the M.A.

It also bears mention in this area that faculty feel that the process for retention, tenure, and promotion at WCU is clear and appropriate to their work in a regional comprehensive institution. Such transparency is crucial in encouraging a faculty committed to teaching and student development.

Productivity

At the same time they are providing exceptional teaching, faculty in the English Department have over the past seven years produced a scholarly record worthy of highest recognition. English faculty at WCU publish creative work and scholarship with top-tier presses such as Random House, Routledge, Duke University Press, Yale University Press, Louisiana State University Press, and the Modern Language Association; in journals such as the *South Atlantic Review*, *Studies in English Literature*, the *African American Review*, and *College Literature*; and they present at selective national and international venues such as the International Congress on Medieval Studies, the Rhetorical Society of America, the Society for the Study of Southern Literature, the American Literature Association, and the annual Conference on College Composition and Communication. This is a faculty engaged with scholarly production at the highest levels and with the most estimable results.

Collegiality

The Western Carolina University community may not realize how exceptional their English Department actually is in this regard, but we found ourselves envious of the collegiality and genuine affection in which members of the faculty hold one another. Both tenure line and non-tenure line faculty remarked on the ways in which colleagues interact and share resources. Students commented that the best thing about their program was the faculty; indeed, one student remarked that he finds himself spending more and more time in the English Department because of what he described as “the

positive vibe” there. Non-tenure line faculty remarked that they do not feel themselves to be second-tier faculty, and that they and their colleagues genuinely like and respect each other. As a result, students are drawn to this community of scholars and learn what true academic community and collaboration look like.

Curriculum

The Department of English offers courses and degree programs that clearly reflect current theory, research, and practice in English studies. A series of concentrations allow students to pursue multiple avenues toward the degree, possibilities reflecting the Department’s acknowledgment of the range of intellectual and professional styles that comprise the field. Moreover, in all these concentrations both undergraduate and graduate students benefit from working with faculty who are actively publishing and presenting their work. At the same time, recent transformations in major requirements have reduced greatly students’ exposure to the literary histories of the United States and Britain, a potential concern we address below. Lastly, we admire the crafting and positioning of the gateway course ENGL 200, which undergraduate program coordinators praise as a forum in which students shape professional identities and build intellectual and professional aspirations from early in their programs of study.

Henry Report

Reports conducted by the Education Policy Initiative at UNC Chapel Hill (Henry, et al.) in 2009, 2011, and 2013 have commended the program in English Education, singling it out among English Education programs in the UNC system for producing teachers who have measurable positive impact on student learning. WCU graduates in English education, these external investigators remark in the most recent iteration of this report, are “more effective than all other sources of teachers” in high school English (Henry et al. 11).

Observations and Recommendations

TESOL

The shuttering of the graduate TESOL program has had far-reaching effects. While relatively small, the program was strong and well-positioned to grow: graduates enjoyed a remarkable 100% rate of job placement, something few programs can dream of, still less achieve. Further, the program staffed positions in the university itself and in neighboring agencies whose services are increasingly sought by non-native speakers of English. To take but one example, TESOL is now no longer in place to serve Western’s recent influx of students from Saudi Arabia; such programs serve as evidence of a host institution’s commitment to nurturing international populations, but they require an investment of resources targeted to meet these students’ needs. The university will

have difficulty attracting and retaining similar cohorts of students if necessary infrastructure is lacking. For this reason alone, scuttling the TESOL master's program may not have been the best course of action in retrospect, but its implications extend far beyond. Having precipitated the departure of an esteemed faculty member, the loss of the graduate TESOL at Western Carolina University has instilled a sense among English faculty that their will as a Department was insufficiently addressed by WCU administration at this crucial juncture. The resulting morale problem remains to be directly addressed by WCU administration, as explained below.

Course Enrollments

One of the greatest challenges currently facing the Department of English concerns rising enrollment caps, which have far outpaced current consensus on best practice, especially in the teaching of writing. Courses in first- and second-year composition at WCU are currently capped at 24, making WCU composition courses—courses more closely tied to undergraduate success than any other at most universities—the most over-populated in the North Carolina system. This cap exceeds current recommendations by the Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC) and the Association of Departments of English (ADE) by 9 students, or 138% of the best practice recommendation. Instructor course loads are also implicated here, as non-tenure line faculty teach up to four sections of writing for a potential total of 96 students per semester, which translates to 96 projects requiring feedback for every assignment. When one considers that a key to successful writing instruction is asking students to write multiple papers with multiple drafts, it becomes clear that instructional effectiveness is inevitably compromised by the sheer number of students. When the review team spoke to the non-tenure line faculty who teach the bulk of these courses, they shared their frustration that because of time constraints they simply do not have time to provide the kind of instruction they wish to provide and that students crave: conferences with individual students are proven effective, but even if an instructor limits the appointment times to 15 minutes per student, conferences alone would consume 24 hours in a week, not including class, preparation, or grading time.

We strongly recommend reinstating caps of 20 students per section; while still not ideal, this would bring WCU closer to the field's standards.

Hiring

At the same time, undergraduate growth at WCU requires further hiring in the Department of English in order to meet the University's responsibility to its growing freshman base to provide high-quality instruction in these crucial and introductory courses. Tenure-line hiring, obviously, is always preferable to adjunct. But even if administration cannot produce the funding streams necessary to support tenure lines exclusively, the Office of Academic Affairs must budget to take on an equitable combination of tenure-track faculty and lecturers. Not doing so will undermine Western Carolina University's ability to serve its current enrollment boom.

One route toward meeting the needs created by WCU's current growth spurt may be to budget for 1:1 hiring. In other words, given the funding the Department could hire one full-time, tenure-track assistant professor per full-time lecturer brought in to teach composition exclusively. Where practicable, we would advocate for hiring faculty with terminal degrees, though full-time lecturer positions could be filled conscientiously with recent graduates of the M.A. program or from area institutions such as Appalachian State University in Boone.

Lastly, it must be pointed out that faculty diversity levels in the English Department (as noted in Self-Study Appendix 4a, p. 1) do not reflect either North Carolina demographics or the racial and ethnic distributions of WCU's student population (see Self-Study Appendix 5a, p. 3). We recommend that the Department seize the chances presented in future hires to increase the racial and ethnic diversity of the faculty, but we also point out that improvements in this area will require prioritization by university administration along with additional funding for effective recruiting.

Office Administration

The external review of 2007 recommended that the Department be supported with two full-time office Administrative Support Associates (ASA). At the present, the Department has one able full-time ASA and a second qualified, but part-time, ASA.

We reiterate the recommendation of the 2007 external review. But beyond this concern, current staff describe a protracted onboarding process leaving them, for example, without login IDs for the first six weeks of their appointment. Such delays impede the Department and the University as a whole, and do not reflect WCU's commitment to excellence. English administrative support must not be paralyzed for such extended periods, and certainly not at the outset of a fall semester. Some institutions centralize systems training in the Human Resources Department and it appears that WCU has moved to that model as well, but the training modules offered on their website are by no means comprehensive in scope at this time.

Given the kinds of work they are hired to do, especially dealing with budget and other crucial systems such as Banner, ASAs are paid poorly; even so, we were told that it is more difficult to get an office staff position than to get a tenure-line faculty member. This seems short-sighted, particularly when these administrative associates are often the first line of communication students have with any office on campus; staff should be well compensated and well trained in consideration of their crucial support role in the educational mission of the university.

Physical Space

Generally speaking, the Department occupies a space much like those we have seen at other institutions; indeed, some of the offices we saw while greeting faculty on our tour are larger than we have seen (and worked in) elsewhere. The faculty lounge is especially nice, a gift from a donor who understood the importance of physical space in

building community. For students, however, there is no area to congregate for work and community building because of the configuration of the offices and corridors. Students mentioned that the History Department has a space for students and remarked that they would welcome the creation of such an environment for English; commuters especially need somewhere to work, eat lunch, and collaborate with their fellow students and with faculty members. They imagine a space where graduate students could mentor undergraduates. While we did not see a space that immediately suggested itself as a location for a departmental student commons, we would suggest that the Department work with the university physical plant to identify a space in the building that could be converted for use by students: perhaps a classroom that is too small to be used for instruction, or some other underutilized space that could be repurposed.

Curriculum

As commended above, the English Department offers highly integrated curricula that serve undergraduates in a broad variety of ways. Programs in Literature, Rhetoric and Composition, and Professional Writing each include capstone experiences and place an emphasis on outcomes—particularly professional opportunities for graduates that range from journalism to graduate school. These curricula have formed both in order to serve the strategic aims of the Department and in response to staffing shortfalls and other losses including the dismantling of the graduate TESOL program. The Department's success in developing an undergraduate TESOL license for K-12 teachers is to be commended, as are current plans to institute annual team-taught courses along a model already tried in conjunction with the History Department.

All English curricula require three courses that undertake both massive historical coverage and introductory theoretical education. This approach represents a compression of materials that offers the Department certain advantages as it pursues other objectives on its students' behalf (for example, to equip them professionally in areas other than literary historiography) even as it presents challenges in terms of the Department's effort "to cultivate an appreciation of and facility with English language and letters" (see Self-Study, Executive Summary iii). For example, students told us they learned much from ENGL 241 (Formalism and American Literature), but also confessed that at the end of the course they felt still relatively uninformed about the larger shape of the national canon and its counter-traditions. One might acknowledge that the more we learn, the more we understand how little we know; even so, a single three-credit course both to survey U.S., British, or non-western world literature and to present research methodology and literary theory, strikes us as presenting a tremendous amount of material to cover well—even without the added item of educating students in the basics of formalist close reading or cultural criticism. Another uncertainty concerns the logic behind the linkages between particular national or international traditions and particular theoretical orientations. For instance, students felt that ENGL 240 (Research, Literary Criticism and British Literature) integrated its critical components with the course's literary substance, but they described a much looser connection between critical and literary course matter in ENGL 242 (Cultural Studies and Non-Western World Literature).

The shape of these courses shows that English Department faculty are attempting to gesture toward a “coverage” model even while emphasizing that an English degree facilitates certain styles of reading more crucial than a comprehensive grasp of any particular literary tradition. Reverting to a more traditional sequence including two-part national surveys would seem untenable at this point in the Department’s history given its other strategic objectives (see for instance strategic visions 2B, 2C, 2D) and its admirable focus on other dimensions of English Studies. Still, one way to offer these courses some relief could be to disaggregate their critical components to a 200-level course in critical practices, a prerequisite to ENGL 240, 241, and 242 (and perhaps resulting in the renumbering of these courses at the 300-level). Several students with whom we spoke agreed that a prior course in theory or criticism would have provided context for the surveys, and some commented that an undergraduate version of the graduate research methodology course now taught by Professor Gastle (ENGL 618) would be most helpful. One student, a double-major in History and English, pointed out that the History B.A. offers something along these lines (HIS 297): a sophomore seminar covering fundamentals of research.

A last potential area for further planning involves the Concentration in Motion Picture Studies and the Film Studies Minor, both of which currently depend upon two faculty members. The continued stability of these tracks would seem to require a future full-time hire to provide greater scheduling flexibility as well as relief for faculty on leave, on sabbatical, or entering retirement.

Opportunities for Graduate Students

Graduate students we met mentioned needing/wanting TA support beyond what ENGL 514 provides. They remarked that faculty are an excellent resource and always willing to help, but students would like something more structured and less ad hoc. They also remarked that they thought they could be excellent resources for each other, but there is no way to be in touch about what is happening in classes, especially once they’ve completed 514. There are no common syllabi nor templates for syllabi or assignments. While there is a Graduate Student Association on campus, there is not one specifically for English graduate students; while there is a graduate branch of Sigma Tau Delta, students suggest that it is not very active. The Department has a shared drive, but no wiki or electronic commons that serves as a bulletin board. One possible solution to at least part of this concern would be to create webpages that could serve some of these functions. One such example can be found at http://www.emich.edu/english/fywp/fywp_resources.php. This page links to Eastern Michigan University’s First-Year Writing Program’s resource page, which includes links to the program wiki, blog, research guides, historical data, and electronic journal. The wiki in particular has rich resource sections for students and for instructors. While time-consuming to construct initially, such a resource could go a long way in helping students feel more supported and connected. Indeed, given the heavy lifting the composition program does, the students believe that writing should have a stronger presence in the Department than 3 faculty and 2 graduate students.

Marketing the Department

The English Department faces particular recruiting challenges at this moment in its history. Part of an institution approximately 40% of whose student body are first-generation degree candidates, the English Department must—like all units within Western Carolina University—articulate its economic “payoff” to students (and parents) who sometimes lack an understanding of the full value of a post-secondary degree. This challenge is accentuated for English departments around the country, which offer courses and curricula whose relation to economic success can appear unclear to those without economic power. At WCU—as in many departments of English around the country—numbers of majors appear to be contracting, though job placement among graduates continues to be robust.

Of course, successful messaging concerning the Department of English will depend not only upon the University’s re-investment in a strategic marketing push, but also in the development of structural aspects of the Department, which we have addressed above. Certainly at this moment the English Department appears insufficiently supported to announce its strengths to the region and the state. The recent hire of a new university marketing director, we hope, will mark a new chapter for the English Department in this respect, but we remain concerned about the limited funding for marketing the M.A. program. We strongly suggest the Department form a graduate committee to advise and assist the director. At the moment, the English Department’s Director of Graduate Studies designs print advertising, which she distributes through direct mailing to sister departments, and which are also brought to graduate school fairs by Western representatives not necessarily connected with the English Department. The M.A. program also maintains a Facebook page, though the flight of students to other social media platforms like Twitter and Pinterest may render the Facebook page less effective. In her capacity as principal advisor for graduate students in English, consultant to the Chair for graduate steering, and program representative on numerous College and University committees, the Director of Graduate Studies in English is simply too occupied to also both devise and execute the University’s marketing strategy for the English M.A.

Further, the emergence of Lenoire-Rhyne’s “Center for Graduate Studies” in Asheville accentuates the M.A. program’s marketing dilemma. The Center will challenge the English Department’s appeal to area applicants, many of whom will mistake this program—though it is staffed with faculty without the terminal degree—for a graduate program as respectable as any. This development alone calls for a strategic marketing initiative by WCU concerning its English graduate degree. Operating through the Office of University Marketing in partnership with the Graduate School, the University should consult with the English M.A. Director in order to devise strategies for print, social media, and/or television and radio in order to trumpet the advantages of WCU’s M.A. in English. These campaigns should be executed on the program’s behalf and in consultation with the faculty, not by the faculty of the program itself. Because this

competition will likely affect other WCU programs, efforts on behalf of the English Department could be folded into a larger intervention strategy.

The English Department has core strengths that should provide ballast for this marketing effort. For example, it offers a concentration in Professional and Technical Writing that serves students who aspire to careers in business, industry, law, marketing, and myriad other sectors. In our estimation, the curriculum English Department members have built is well suited to prepare students for a broad range of careers, as the program stresses critical thinking, close attention to detail, interpretive skills, facility in communication, and a host of other highly sought after skills. At the same time, the M.A. program is staffed by faculty who are possessed of the terminal degree, who are producing scholarship at the highest levels, and who are authoring poetry and prose nationally recognized as significant contributions to contemporary U.S. literature. These strengths can provide pillars for future marketing of the M.A. in English.

Writing Across the Curriculum

Writing Across the Curriculum could benefit the entire WCU community and was mentioned in several of our interviews as an initiative that could facilitate campus-wide discussion of writing, including instruction, process, and assessment. Institutions we have seen with robust WAC programs have a distinct advantage in assessment because they have a skill set to measure across the student's university career. Stakeholders from the composition sequence partner with faculty in other departments to agree upon metrics that can then be applied in basic writing classes, gateway courses, and capstones. By touching student learning at those points, faculty can effectively track student progress from entrance into the university to completion of their degrees. Apparently, discussions concerning WAC are taking place on campus, but without resources, a comprehensive WAC program cannot succeed. The English Department currently does not have sufficient funding or personnel to begin or sustain a WAC program, and in any case such programs are by definition a multilateral campus effort.

However, writing within the disciplines is crucial to student success, both in college and beyond. Given that the writing sequence has perforce been made a two-year program due to budget and resultant personnel cuts, the stage is set to create writing intensive opportunities for students to continue to hone their skills in their majors and minors. We imagine that the introduction of Writing Intensive course designations might be tied to either General Education or disciplinary outcomes, or both.

Not only would continuing writing instruction beyond the 101/202 sequence ensure that students develop their writing throughout their university education, it could help address potential writing deficiencies in transfer and ESL populations without seeming to penalize students whose instructional background may not have adequately prepared them to succeed in writing.

One challenge to introducing Writing Across the Curriculum and Writing Intensive courses lies with the (non-English Department) faculty themselves: some may be

uncomfortable with the idea of writing instruction or being held accountable for including writing instruction in their courses. However, infrastructure already in place could be augmented to assist faculty in developing WAC or WI courses. The Writing and Learning Commons currently offers training to its Writing Fellows; with sufficient resources, this program could be adapted to address the needs of faculty across the university who would welcome further training in writing instruction. The difficulty, of course, is resources, including personnel: the Writing Fellows program is at capacity and simply does not have the wherewithal to add another initiative of this scope, certainly not one as large as WAC/WI, nor does the English Department. However, such a partnership could significantly impact quality writing instruction across campus and would require modest investment compared to the potential gains in student success.

The WCU Literary Festival and Beyond

The Department is wise to seek renewed and expanded support of its Literary Festival, now in its sixth year and by all accounts a fixture of university tradition (see Self-Study Appendices, Strategic Vision 3A). And yet, the success of the Literary Festival may also indicate that now could be a moment to embark on a parallel endeavor to raise the Department's profile still further. This could be a scholarly center, a program for educational outreach, an annual symposium, or some other entity or event to connect some two or three of the intellectual and creative resources currently in place. For instance, one hire in an area to complement the Department's strengths in Appalachian literature—an early Americanist with a focus on the colonial or antebellum South, for example (as early U.S. literature is a gap in the current faculty roster)—could position the Department as a center for teaching, scholarship, and creative activity relating to this area. Given perhaps three or four faculty committed to the undertaking, such a center could present an opportunity to garner the support of organizations such as the National Endowment for the Humanities. Alternatively—or as a way to assess the viability of such an undertaking—a committee of invested faculty could plan a one-week summer workshop for K-12 educators interested in literary Appalachia. Such an undertaking would seem tailor-made for the NEH's "Landmarks of American History and Culture" program (<http://www.neh.gov/grants/education/landmarks-american-history-and-culture-workshops-school-teachers>), and moreover, it could involve more units on campus than English, becoming an undertaking in concert with several of WCU's priorities (see goals 1.1, 1.2, 1.5). It would also engage multiple components of the Department of English's strategic vision (see for instance Strategic Vision 1A, 1C) as well as the departmental mission to foster "Appreciation of the rich linguistic, literary, and cultural heritage of this region while helping students to achieve a more global perspective."

In that spirit, such a project could focus upon the nearby Eastern Band of the Cherokee Nation, its fecund literary culture before and after the Removal, and the literary resonance of the Removal among nineteenth-century Indians' rights advocates well beyond the region and indeed beyond the South. The history of the *Cherokee Phoenix* and its inaugural editor, Elias Boudinot, could provide educational projects drawing the Departments of English, History, and Communications together with the minor in

Cherokee Studies, enhancing WCU students' understanding of their unique environs and its crucial role in national history, and providing opportunities to build new connections with the Eastern Band of the Nation itself. If designed to exploit digital holdings of the *Phoenix* (available in .html through WCU's Hunter Library, but also in facsimile through the University of Georgia's GALILEO project), such a project could serve the Department's current ambitions to branch into the digital humanities. Moreover, if conceived as an educational program targeted at community college educators, the effort would fit well within the parameters of the NEH's "Bridging Cultures" grant program (<http://www.neh.gov/grants/education/bridging-cultures-community-colleges>). With further investment, such an effort could expand to open connections with a sister institution near the Western Band of the Cherokee Nation in Oklahoma; Northeastern State University in Tahlequah, OK (which is also the location of tribal government offices), offers a major in Cherokee education, a major and minor in Cherokee cultural studies, as well as a minor in the Cherokee language. An exchange program could enrich both campuses as well as both the Eastern and Western bands of the Cherokee Nation; moreover, it could garner positive media exposure for WCU, allowing the university to define itself further as an institution rooted in its own cultural and geographical environs. An exchange would also provide opportunities for students who have not traveled far from their home region to live and study in another community for a semester or a year, thereby broadening their experience while keeping them on track to finish their degree programs.

Another possible venture for the English Department may be to establish a Master's of Fine Arts program in Creative Writing. MFA programs around the country are an enrollment draw, as aspiring creative writers seek instruction from accomplished novelists, poets, and creative nonfiction writers, and the English Department at WCU is well-positioned to serve such a demand, given the exceptionally talented creative writing faculty already in place. At the same time, of course, there are ethical considerations to such initiatives, since the employment outlook for MFAs remains far from certain. Moreover, the creation of an MFA degree may raise the issue of whether the Department should offer an undergraduate major in creative writing. Such questions would have to be resolved in light of the scheduling realities of the existing cohort of faculty as well as the Department's prospects for future hires.

Study Abroad

The English Department states that a part of its mission is to "foster global citizenship," and yet there is a pervasive admission that the Department is not able to offer its students enough chances to study abroad. (This is an area addressed in the Department's Strategic vision document; see Self-Study Appendix "Strategic Planning," 1D.) The paucity of study-abroad options for students has been a university-wide problem at WCU, however, and the recent hire of a new Director of International Programs may open new opportunities in this area. Certainly English majors at WCU should have the option to earn credits on short-term courses in international locales relating to the objects of their study and the expertise of faculty (for example, South Africa or England). We hope that the new Director of International Programs will

undertake the formation of such opportunities, but not in a way that places upon English faculty the burden of building a culture of study abroad “from the ground up.” Rather, interested English faculty should work with the new director to identify potential sites, develop curricula, form budgets, and implement marketing and recruiting. The costs of these undertakings, moreover, should not place additional strain on the Department’s resources—the newly formed Office of International Programs should take on the priority on nurturing this key area for WCU’s global outreach.

Department Morale

In general, the morale of the Department is suggestive of exhaustion occasioned by a number of factors. Although faculty just received a \$1,000 pay increase for FY15, previous to this year they had received no significant raises in salary in seven years, while at the same time facing multiple cuts to the operating budget, which compromises the Department’s ability to support research and instruction. In order to offset budget pressure, course caps have been creeping upward, making best pedagogical practices impossible; for faculty as committed to student success as those in WCU’s English Department, the pain caused by such a compromise of excellence is visceral. Further, while they are hampered instructionally by increased class size, they are continually being asked to do more and more uncompensated administrative work; this is a faculty stretched thin and increasingly driven to make bricks without straw. For example, faculty reported feeling pressured to offer online courses, but believe they are without essential resources and support to learn how to create pedagogically sound online offerings. The Coulter Faculty Commons has in the past offered summer scholarships for faculty interested in developing online courses, but the training occurred over a week-long session during summer in Asheville and required faculty to apply. Similarly, faculty are increasingly pushed to find external funding in a political climate hostile to the humanities and to demonstrate the utility of an English degree in terms of dollars and cents to counter pervasive—and demonstrably mistaken—accusations of irrelevancy. To encounter this rhetoric from the broader culture is frustrating; to meet it in one’s own institution of higher learning is devastating. Further, faculty are anxious that emphasis on external funding may result in a two-tiered faculty (research and teaching tracks); while they understand the budget realities facing WCU, they are concerned that some of the pressures they are facing may change the shape of education at WCU and their role in it.

Within the university community, members of the Department feel ignored on many fronts, surrounding both positive and negative issues. For example, while the English Education major has garnered considerable praise in state reports, the WCU administration has been largely silent about that accomplishment. When the university decided to convert the parking lot closest to the Coulter Building to a paid lot in order to raise funds for the construction of a parking deck, faculty were not consulted, nor has the administration been willing to discuss that decision subsequently; while parking might seem a minor issue compared with other pressures, we have observed that it is almost without exception a hot-button question in every workplace. In this case as in others, faculty feel as though the upper administration refuses to discuss potentially

volatile issues and shuts down conversations that, while perhaps contentious, would be far healthier to have in order to reach understanding, if not consensus. The most significant of these uncomfortable conversations, of course, is the elimination of the graduate TESOL program, mentioned above. While faculty assured us that they believe the process that resulted in shuttering TESOL was rigorous and thoughtful, they also believe that the Department did not have sufficient opportunity to discuss the decision with the administration, either before or after it was implemented. While the current administration is not responsible for the original decision, it has a responsibility to consider carefully the effects this foreclosure of dialogue has had (and continues to have) on the faculty. When reprioritization was implemented, the campus community was told that the reviews would continue on a year-to-year basis in order to ensure ongoing quality controls. Because unforeseen circumstances led to a change in administration, members of the Department now believe that the loss of graduate TESOL resulted from bad luck and timing as much as from any other factor. Also, because they lost a valued colleague as a result of this decision, faculty feel vulnerable and uncertain in this current review process.

Lastly, there is a disconnect between Department reality and the upper administration's sense of things. In reality, the Department lost 15 lecturers during AY 2008-09, though the Provost told us she believed the number was "three or four." We believe the Department and the University would benefit from more frequent and robust dialogue between the English Department and the Provost.

In short, Western Carolina University's English Department faculty are exceptionally accomplished scholars and teachers whose productivity and collegiality is remarkable. Our concern is that without more support and reciprocity from the administration, these extraordinary educators will feel they have no choice but to seek positions elsewhere. A department that currently serves Western Carolina University and virtually all of its students in some capacity—and with aplomb—could easily and suddenly contract.