External Review Summary
Humanities Programs
The University of Tennessee at Chattanooga

by

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INTRODUCTION:

I was invited to the UTC campus to conduct an external review of the Humanities (B.A.) Programs on March 28th and 29th, 2019. The UTC Humanities Programs consist of three tracks: Humanities: Liberal Arts (H-LA), Humanities: International Studies (H-IS), and Humanities: Women's & Gender Studies (H-WS&G). H-LA is organizationally associated with the Department of Philosophy & Religious Studies. H-IS is organizationally associated with the Department the Department of Modern and Classical Languages and Literatures. H-WS&G is organizationally associated with the Department of English. H-LA and H-LS offer Bachelors of Arts programs of study that are flexible and these serve generally as 'open' Liberal Arts majors, providing majors with a diverse academic experience unique to each student. H-WS&G is a slightly more 'defined' program of study but within their existing curriculum students equally enjoy an exciting and diverse range of course topics and experiences. During my visit I met with a consortium of individuals key to the operation and success of the Humanities Programs. I met with Provost George Hynd, Vice-Provost Matt Matthews, Dean Joe Wilferth, Cindy Williamson, Director of Assessment, Department Head Joshua Davies, Carl Springer, Humanities Program coordinator, Marcia Noe, Women's Studies & Gender coordinator, Professors Dennis Plaisted, Jonathan Yeager, Bryan Hampton, Jose-Luis Gastanaga, Karen Casebier, Talia Welsh, and Ethan Mills. Additionally, I sat in on Professor David Pleins afternoon class, I met with a group of students enrolled in the Humanities Programs, and I visited with Scott Seagle, director of the Walker Center for Teaching and Learning. In all of my conversations, I must say I was greatly impressed by the high level of enthusiasm, excitement, commitment and involvement I witnessed in all parties involved. Successful programs require not only exceptional individuals but also an exceptional amount of individual investment and it is rare to find such a high degree of both as I did at UTC.

In what follows I will begin with a general observation, followed by a summary of these key areas: (a) Learning Outcomes & Assessment, (b) Curriculum Design, (c) Student Experience, (d) Program Faculty, (e) Learning/Instruction Resources, and (f) Programs Support. For each, I have considered a variety of indicators, e.g., conversations, a classroom visit, course and program materials, institutional data, student comments, course evaluations, tours of facilities, and assessments of academic achievement. Dr. Carl Springer's excellent and thorough Humanities Self-Study proved invaluable to my visit. Finally, I will end this narrative with a summary of my impressions of the overall success and value of the Humanities Programs at UT-C and offer for your consideration a set of recommendations.

GENERAL OBSERVATIONS:

First off, I would like to say that many of the challenges and difficulties interdepartmental and interdisciplinary based programs such as the UTC Humanities Programs face are quite familiar to those of us who lead similar programs. Each program must invent its own solutions, and although there isn't any one method/model of success that works for everyone, from what I've witnessed during my visit, the UTC Humanities Programs have done a remarkable job of meeting many of these challenges unique to the culture here. UTC Humanities Programs rate strongly to that of peer programs. There is clear evidence of academic rigor and achievement, a small but devoted faculty associated with the program, committed support from college and university administrators, and a robust and exciting evolving curriculum available to students. Program enrollments and graduation rates are holding steady and/or rising historically. One area of considerable improvement has been in retention, where averages have not only increased but are now only slightly lower than the average retention rate for all

CAS majors. Being there are so little resources directly devoted to the Humanities Programs, this should be seen as a considerable accomplishment. Equally, all three tracks have made visible progress in implementing many of the recommendations from its previous program review. In short, although the UTC Humanities still face considerable challenges and resource needs, as many interdepartmental/interdisciplinary based programs do, it is sound and of considerable benefit to both students and the state of Tennessee.

PROGRAM GOALS, LEARNING OUTCOMES, AND ASSESSMENT:

Each of the three Humanities tracks identify clear missions, visions unique to each concentration, and appropriate program goals. Key learning goals for all tracks are appropriate to the humanities, comparable to programs of a similar nature, and serviceable to the potential career opportunities students can expect after graduation. The Humanities: Liberal Arts and Humanities: International Studies learning goals focus primarily on the following areas: (1) cultural and human understanding, (2) analytical thinking/problem solving, and (3) communication competency. The Women's Studies track is slightly more focused on issues and realities related to women & gender, including these as additional features of their cultural and human understanding learning goals. Learning outcomes for Liberal Arts and International Studies consist of an array of traditional and experiential learning platforms, such as a humanities-based curriculum, internship, study abroad, a Program of Study Rationale, significant upper-level work, and an approved course selection consisting of a minimum of three different departments. Major research-oriented essays and/or projects round out these platforms. The Women's Studies and Gender track works with additional content outcomes appropriate to their area of focus.

Existing learning outcomes for all tracks are appropriate, albeit somewhat traditional. I will offer some suggestions later on how learning outcomes might be 'expanded' for a 21st Century University role and mission. Overall, however, the three Humanities tracks have a useful and beneficial learning outcomes structure in place. There is clear indication that much thought and ongoing care have been given to each program's design and implementation.

One of the major challenges of any program is the assessment of learning outcomes and program goals. Measures and indicators appropriate for assessing humanities programs in general are often difficult to isolate and pin down, given the nature of the humanities content and academic focus. All three Humanities tracks work with credible and appropriate measures, such as capstone projects, annotated bibliographies, reflective essays, and final exams. Additionally, all three tracks offer positive evidence of student success in gaining meaningful employment after graduation. To summarize, assessment data presented in the Self-Study indicate student achievement for all three tracks meets or exceeds reasonable expectations—given the challenge and on-going difficulty of student achievement assessment.

CURRICULUM DESIGN

Curricula for all three of the Humanities tracks are sound and appropriate for each track's focus. The programs of study for each are rigorous and on par with peer institutions and programs of a similar nature. Required courses, a variety of exciting course offerings, and a strong foundation in Gen Ed requirements provide students with a meaningful and exciting academic experience. Requiring that all

students take at a minimum of two years of a foreign language is commendable and, given the increasing global nature of the human footprint, quite appropriate for the 21st century workplace. However, it should be noted that at this time there are only a limited number of languages students can take to fulfill this requirement. The limited number of language offerings may adversely affect program enrollments by making these majors somewhat less attractive to students. But some strides have been made in this area, such as a new second-year study abroad language option in final development.

All three tracks feature a reasonable variety of in-program, cross-listed course offerings, especially in the Humanities: Woman Studies and Gender track. Given the flexible design of these programs, students also benefit from many exciting and impactful course offerings available in the surrounding UTC humanities departments.

In reviewing the sample course materials and student work provided to me for this review, course content appears timely, interesting, challenging, and relevant to the contemporary world. Instructors take considerable care and preparation in the presentation and design of their syllabi and classroom experience. Individual learning outcomes and assignments specific to course content are appropriate, rigorous, and innovative. The work expected from students is both challenging and befitting undergraduate instruction at this level.

STUDENT EXPERIENCE

Assessing student experience is always a challenging and ongoing difficulty facing any major. In my visit, I met with two groups of students: (a) students enrolled in a humanities class and (b) existing majors in Humanities: Liberal Arts and Humanities: International Studies. I also spoke with a recent graduate. Students expressed a general sense of satisfaction with their chosen major and felt their degree paths were meaningful. It must be noted that the number of students enrolled in the Humanities Programs I met with was small comparatively speaking to the overall enrollment numbers. But their responses were somewhat confirmed in other indicators (e.g., student course surveys) I looked at during my visit. In the Program Self-Study, although the response from the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) conducted in 2017 was disappointing, students who did respond rated the Humanities Programs as generally favorable and of value to them in the areas of faculty involvement, curriculum, cultural experience at UTC & satisfaction with UTC. What most impressed me about the student experience was the considerably robust student enrichment opportunities, which were both diverse and plentiful. Such experiences ranged from lectures, Humanities colloquia (discontinued in 2016), visiting actors, documentary & narrative film showings, cultural events, internships, and numerous individual research projects, service learning, and study abroad opportunities.

One initiative I should note was the commitment Chair Joshua Davies and Program Coordinator Carl Springer have with offering students within the Humanities a series of new and innovative class orderings of special topic courses at the upper level. I visited such a class, e.g., The Geography of Happiness, and the students were enthusiastic about the learning experience they were receiving in the course. Comments ranged from "we are being challenged in new ways," "analytically relaxed," and "unlike anything other class I've taken." Almost all the students in class said they were "spreading the word among their friends about this class."

Since the fall of 2016, all three of the tracks moved to a new advising structure, where students were assigned faculty advisors from MCLL, Philosophy and Religion, and English. This move alleviated issues with advising loads and from all appearance seems a successful means of furthering and ensuring student success. Students I spoke with felt this mostly a positive change, although concern was voiced about "getting the right advisor." This change highlights an efficient and hopefully mutually beneficial use of existing resources in CAS. Equally, UTC utilizes advising tools such as online assessible degree progress reports, regularized advising periods, degree checks at crucial junctures in their progress towards graduation, and 'Clear Path to Graduation' templates for each of the three tracks.

UTC operates an electronic course evaluation process which gives students an opportunity to offer feedback regarding courses and faculty. Samples of student feedback from Fall 2017 show higher percentages of 'complete agreement' in 6 key measures (instructor willingness, classroom engagement, timely feedback, communication, instructor expectations, etc.) than those in both the College of Arts and Sciences and the general university (84-68% percent range). This indicates some evidence of very strong student satisfaction regarding courses and faculty instruction being offered by the Humanities Programs.

One enriching component of student experience is diversity. Given the ongoing challenges of diversity, the Humanities Programs are doing a reasonably good job in both fostering and achieving a degree of diversity within its student population. Diversity data in the Program Self-Study showed that the percentages of under-represented students enrolled in the Humanities were slightly higher than the overall university average. More importantly, many of the courses being offered in the Humanities Programs contain a considerable amount of diversity content, while many of the events sponsored by all three tracks highlight issues related to diversity. Both help create a more welcoming and inclusive environment for under-represented student populations.

In summary, given what I witnessed during my visit, students in the UTC Humanities Programs appear to be receiving a rewarding and personally satisfactory experience.

PROGRAM FACULTY

One of the surprising advantages of interdepartmental and interdisciplinary programs is the somewhat paradoxical reality that such programs have no faculty but at the same time do enjoy access to the largest faculty in the entire College of Arts and Sciences. Since students in the Humanities Programs take courses from all of the departments in the college, students have access to a good many dedicated and highly qualified instructors. The College of Arts and Sciences should be commended for the superior level of achievement in terms of scholarly and creative engagement, professional affiliations, and individual accomplishment among its general faculty. Thirty or more faculty members are directly involved with instruction of HUM and WSTU courses, which helps considerably in keeping the quality of instruction for the core courses in each of the tracks at a high level.

Being that nearly a hundred percent of the faculty who do teach courses that count in the Humanities Programs belong to individual departments, it was somewhat difficult for me to evaluate key faculty considerations such as teaching loads, professional development opportunities, and service loads. In the conversations I did have with individual instructors involved in teaching cross-listed or special topics courses, none voiced any loud concerns regarding their workloads, demands, or additional

commitments to the Humanities Programs. One aspect of those who do teach courses for the Humanities Programs that should be noted is the high rate of tenured faculty with a considerable degree of quality academic accomplishment. Students in all three of the Humanities tracks benefit.

One achievement since the previous program review should be mentioned: considerable improvement has been made in the number of faculty directly now directly involved with the Humanities: Liberal Art and the Humanities: International Studies Programs. Not only has the move to 'house' both tracks in the MCLL and Philosophy & Religion helped considerably but tireless efforts by Josh Davies and Carl Springer should also be recognized.

One other commendable fact I would like to mention here involves online instruction. As of December 31st, 2018, 91% of the faculty have completed the QM Applying the Quality Matters Rubric workshop, designed to improve the quality of online and hybrid courses. This indicates that some attention and resolution has been given to improving the quality of online instruction being offered.

Finally, existing structures for faculty evaluation and promotion seem both robust and efficient. Teaching loads and service expectations appear reasonable and on par with peer universities. Again, this is primarily based on conversations with a limited number of faculty and as such can be better substantiated in individual department's program reviews, since nearly all of the faculty who teach courses that serve the Humanities Programs are housed in regular departments.

LEARNING/TEACHING RESOURCES

Resources for both learning and teaching come in a variety of different shapes and sizes. UTC commitment to both is commendable. UTC recently built a new Library and this investment to student success and academic/intellectual endeavor is impressive—and an invaluable resource for students in the Humanities Program. It is expansive, thoughtfully designed, and geared toward student-learning. Scott Seagle, the director of the Walker Center for Teaching and Learning, informed me that there is a sizable number of student-orientated academic success initiatives and there exists a strong infrastructure for helping instructors improve their teaching. He cited a number of current programs focused on helping students, numerous teaching workshops, instructional observation, and a plethora of teaching and learning resources, such as, to name only a few, 'cooperative learning,' 'lecturing with style,' 'concept mapping,' and 'classroom assessment strategies.'

Equally, within each of the Humanities tracks, and in the various departments that directly (and indirectly) support the program, there is an impressive array of learning opportunities, such as lectures, events, film screenings, internship opportunities, essay contests, student achievement recognition awards/events, research & publication opportunities, service learning courses, and faculty lead study aboard programs/trips.

One important factor which greatly enhances student success is advising. Since the previous program review, the Humanities programs have moved to a new advising structure. Where previously all of the students were primarily advised by a single faculty member, e.g., program coordinators, students are now being advised by individual faculty members in departments now associated with each of the three different tracks. The decision to move in this direction helped both alleviate the additional service load put upon the program coordinators while giving each student a greater degree of

personal and individual advising. Additionally, many of the faculty now advising have attended advising training sessions. There is also strong indication that students are also receiving a credible level of 'mentoring,' which is essential for both learning and enriching the overall student experience.

Finally, efforts made by the Programs coordinators, Carl Springer and Marcia Noe, and Department Chair, Joshua Davies, should be acknowledged as vital resources in support of learning and teaching within the three tracks. Each have been tireless in promoting their programs, eliciting high quality instruction, developing new courses and course content, and working closely with the Center for Advisement, which has contributed to the raising retention rates and the maintaining of student enrollments.

PROGRAMS SUPPORT

Most interdepartmental/interdisciplinary programs operate with little or almost nonresistant budgets, and what resources that are available are usually those of the surrounding departments. The advantage here is obvious: these kinds of programs are highly cost effective since they operate with a minimum amount of overhead. However, this often creates an additional burden and drain on the existing department resources, which are often lacking in themselves. It is key that contributing departments are recognized and given credit for the extra burden of 'housing' the Humanities tracks. Human resources are as important as financial ones so it must be reiterated that Department Chair, Josh Davies, and program coordinators, Carl Springer and Marcia Noe, have been instrumental in ensuring the continuing success of all three Humanities tracks. Considering their existing workloads and departmental demands and expectations, they have given a considerable amount of energy and time in making the Humanities Programs what they are today. Each have devoted extra time to the small but important tasks that need to get done, such as attending recruitment events, being available for helping students and parents understand the value of their programs, or assisting with the creation and promotion of posters and flyers featuring and publicizing their programs.

Each of the tracks do receive a modest budget for essential program needs such as recruitment, program marketing, promotion of events and activities, etc. Program coordinators have utilized and maximized what little budgets they do have with admirable efficiency.

Space is always one of the most 'painful' realities of every university environment. Having a space that is recognized as the Humanities Program space is vital for any long-term success. So often interdepartmental or interdisciplinary program exist in a void, drifting here and there, never enjoying any actual space they can call home. Programs need an actual space to survive and flourish, a space where students can come to, where faculty, no matter how few, can be found, where others on campus do recognize as specific to the Humanities Programs. Having an actual space is an absolute essential program resource, crucial for program identity, community, affinity, and credibility. Although there are plans to transfer the departments associated with the Humanities Program to one building, which is a good step, an actual space, no matter how small, devoted to each of the tracks should be a priority.

Finally, successful programs require support staff. Currently, the administrative assistants for the MCLL & Philosophy and Religion assist with the Humanities Programs clerical needs. Given the current size, this may be the more efficient use of existing administrative support resources, but if program growth is a future goal, administrative support staff unique to the Humanities Programs should be considered

as another priority. Successful programs require internal coordination and consistency, neither of which may be attainable if there are not personnel assigned directly to the Humanities Programs.

SUMMARY AND RECOMMENATIONS:

Overall, I am quite impressed with the Humanities Programs as they now exist. Considering the nature, size, and challenges of interdepartmental and interdisciplinary programs, UTC and individuals directly associated with managing and directing these programs should be proud of both their efforts and what they have managed to accomplish since the last program review. All three program tracks are managed well and are designed and operated efficiently, offering students an invaluable and credible undergraduate experience. Students appear satisfied, and there is strong evidence demonstrating that student who do graduate are prepared for what happens after graduation—and have found meaningful jobs and careers paths upon leaving UTC.

Moving forward, the programs goals for the future as identified in the current Self-Study are (1) appropriate, (2) specific to the existing realities of all three tracks, and (3) geared towards maximizing the current successes and future possibilities inherent in interdepartmental and interdisciplinary programs of the size at UTC. From everything I've seen and heard during my visit, I believe the Humanities Programs are substantive, beneficial, and a great value—not only to the students who graduate from these programs but also to the State of Tennessee.

In finishing, I would like to offer the following recommendations for your consideration.

1. In the area of curriculum, all three program tracks should try and build a more visible 'program spine' of classes, which focus on the overall experience and purpose of each track. Both the Humanities: Liberal Arts and the Humanities: International Studies have begun to do this in the way of a Program Rationale their sophomore year and a one-credit senior seminar course. Two of the most important and conflictual needs in programs such as these are (a) flexibility and (b) cohesiveness. Students need help in realizing the accomplishment and purpose of what often appears to them as 'open' majors. Students equally need help in realizing that interdisciplinary majors do have purpose and that there is a critical approach and methodology unique to interdisciplinarity. Equally, often students graduate without fully understanding what they have accomplished. Finally, students enrolled in interdisciplinary programs often lack a sense of program identity and community. Students in interdepartmental/interdisciplinary programs too often exist in the 'unreal space' of pursuing a degree that often doesn't even feel real—at least not in the same ways that other majors feel real. Creating a minimal number of 3 credit course experiences at the junior and senior levels can go a long way in alleviating the 'disjointedness' of student experience and can build a sense of identity, community, and purpose. Such courses could be special topics in nature, focused in part on interdisciplinarity as a critical practice and method (i.e., junior level), but also designed as a means of helping students consolidate and reflect on their choice of major. Incorporating the existing structures (e.g., capstone & Program Rationale) into a slightly more involved two course sequence could be easily accomplished and as such might be better utilization of the current practice of a Program Rationale. The Humanities: Women's Studies track, although somewhat different in focus and design, could also benefit from

a 'spine sequence' focused on creating a distinct sense of program identity, community, and purpose unique that that track.

2. In the area of assessment, all three programs struggle somewhat. Although existing protocols and structures are working, more could be done in this area. There are a number of things you might consider. First, as you are considering your 'spine courses,' consider how you might also use these courses as additional assessment tools. In our program here, we have created a good number of assignments unique to our spine classes' variable topics content but also ones that better allow us to measure achievement in writing, argumentation, speaking, critical thinking and problem-solving. We structure our assignment in ways that are directly correlated with our identified program learning goals and outcomes, which then allows us to collect data directly better aligned with our identified goals and outcomes. Second, consider creating a senior exit survey given to all graduating seniors during their senior capstone seminar. Focus this survey around student satisfaction and your students' sense of accomplishment. Fully utilize your capstone course not only as a tool for reflection but also as your exit student-achievement assessment platform.

3. In the area of student understanding and appreciation of both the major and what they have accomplished in choosing this major, consider creating a one credit portfolio course at the senior level devoted to (a) helping students document their skills and accomplishments in the form of a program portfolio, consisting of essays, research, speeches given, extracurricular activities and involvement, etc., and (b) providing them with a greater understanding of how their specific tracks do properly prepare them for success in the 21st century workplace. Students need help in realizing and articulating what they have learned and what they are now capable of doing and achieving as they move on to the next stage of their lives. Doing this will better help students realize how their program of study is indirectly relevant to the jobs they've found after graduation.

4. In the area of program building, it is essential that at some point there is a larger discussion of what the future holds for the Humanities Programs at UTC. Programs need a way of centering themselves and that almost always requires a greater commitment to administrative appointments and tenure-track lines that are directly associated with each program track. The Coordinator role should be upgraded to Director, whose sole responsibilities are teaching and administering each of the program tracks. It is daunting and next to impossible to maintain and/or improve programs where key personnel have one foot in one place and the other elsewhere. This places additional stress and demands on individuals, who too often burn out. Relying too heavily on finding volunteers from the existing faculty to carry the load of managing your program may inadvertently create a turnkey culture that in the long run may limit or undermine your now reasonably successful programs. This is especially important if one of your goals is to increase enrollments and program presence/credibility on campus.

5. As I've mention in my first recommendation, program identity and community are particularly difficult challenges to overcome in interdepartmental/interdisciplinary programs. Besides your investment in your program curricula, do reevaluate your current 'communications' resources, e.g., websites, program brochures, program posters, and program promotional materials. Try and redesign these platforms in ways that help create program identity and community. Stress these aspects in recruitment events and conversations with students and parents. Try and create stronger ties with Admissions, the Center for Advisenent, and whatever entity on campus works with undeclared majors. Hold events that not only promote the Humanities Programs but also the

identity and community one gains from choosing either of the Humanities tracks. These efforts will help make the Humanities Programs more visible on and off campus. Also, do focus on the specific value of each program and what makes each program unique.

6. In the area of faculty investment, one of the huge challenges of interdepartmental/interdisciplinary programs is program affiliation. Programs which rely almost entirely on faculty from other departments, naturally lack a sustainable sense of cohesion, involvement, and commitment that academic departments normally enjoy. I must pause here and say that it is remarkable that so many of the faculty who do serve the Humanities Programs do appear committed and involved. However, commitment and involvement require formal structures beyond wiliness and interest. A key question my program still faces is how do we create a formal structure of affiliation that creates a lasting and sustainable faculty commitment in the light of no tenure-track lines. I've found two measures that work for us and which might also work for you. The first is the creation of a number of new courses that we cross-list with other departments in the College of Liberal Arts. In some ways, all three tracks are doing something like this in a number of new classes I heard about but perhaps more could be achieved by creating additional courses in some of the key humanities areas that benefit both departments and the Humanities programs. Also highlighting and/or creating course content that 'allows existing humanities courses a chance to break out' is often exciting for both students and faculty. And great platforms for promoting the humanities among non-majors and students still trying to decide on a major. Such courses can also be great advertisements for the humanities in your recruitment attempts. I've found that mutually supporting efforts in course instruction are usually those that last survive only the long run. Second, you may want to consider tenure-track hires with dual commitments, say a 25% appointment in one of the Humanities tracks and 75% appointment with an existing department (which deals with promotion and tenure). Having some stake in a program creates a better foundation for creating a degree of cohesion and investment while also requiring no direct tenure-track appointments.

7. Finally, in regards to program goals, more could be achieved in this area. The role of the university in the 21st century is changing. And so is the 21st century workplace. Program goals and learning outcomes need to 'modernize.' The current program goals and learning outcomes for all three tracks are commendable, valuable, and necessary for the fulfillment of both the Programs' and the larger University mission. But you may want to consider expanding your learning goals and outcomes to better reflect the new skills and abilities students need (and can learn in the humanities) in order to succeed in their careers after graduation. Additional goals and learning outcomes you may want to consider are:

   - Critical Thinking & Problem-Solving (beyond the essay).
   - Researched, fact-based argumentation (beyond the essay).
   - Communication Proficiency.
   - Media/Digital Competency.
   - Visual Information and Design Proficiency.
   - Collaborative Agency.
   - Humanistic and Cultural Understanding.
   - Interdisciplinary Awareness.

In closing, I found my experience at UTC quite rewarding. I wish everyone associated with the three Humanities tracks the best of luck in continuing what I see as a worthy and beneficial undergraduate academic degree program.