

Five-Year Review Report

Department of English, University of Tennessee-Chattanooga, April 25, 2022

Method

The information in this report is based on a study of the University of Tennessee-Chattanooga English Department Undergraduate and Graduate Programs Review (2018-2022), two previous five-year review reports (2013, 2019), an examination of the university's and department's websites, and the two-day site visit I conducted on April 11 and 12, 2023. During my visit, I participated in more than a dozen meetings in several different formats with a range of individuals, including Dr. Andrew McCarthy, Head of the Department of English, Dr. Matt Matthews, Interim Vice Provost, Dr. Pam Riggs-Gelasco, Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences, Dr. Bryan Hampton and Professor Sybil Baker, Associate Department Heads, Dr. Rik Hunter, Department of English Director of Graduate Studies, Dr. Jenn Stewart, Director of Composition, and numerous department faculty, lecturers, and students. The Department Graduate and Undergraduate Programs Review 2018-2022 provided comprehensive assessment of factors impacting the culture of the department and, from my perspective, laid the foundation for extremely productive interviews while on site. At the end of the second day, I delivered a preliminary reflection with several cursory recommendations to Dr. McCarthy, Dr. Matthews, and Dr. Nikolasa Tejero.

General Observations

The Department of English at the University of Tennessee-Chattanooga appears to be in very good shape overall. The department leadership team, in my view, is especially strong. Administrators, faculty, lecturers, and students praised Dr. McCarthy, in particular, throughout my visit for the ways in which he has transformed department culture since his appointment as Head in July 2018. Numerous individuals I spoke with referred to Dr. McCarthy as an "incredible leader" and cited enhanced communication and transparency regarding all departmental concerns. My conversations with undergrad and graduate students enrolled as majors in the department revealed that they "love" their instructors and classes and appreciate the sense of community in the department. These sentiments are corroborated by the fact that students consistently rate their classroom experience in English highly in their evaluations. Faculty and lecturers across all three departmental programs possess vigorous scholarly and creative agendas, regularly receive recognition for their teaching and publications, and are active members of regional, national, and international academic associations.

Recommendations:

1. Tenure-Track Hiring: Professional and Technical Writing

The addition of Dr. Megan Faver Hartline to the Rhetoric and Professional Writing Program in March 2019 is wonderful progress in the effort to meet departmental programming needs. However, several tenure-track faculty in the Rhetoric and Professional Writing still find themselves serving in administrative roles either in the department or the larger university that involve some reduction in teaching load. In order to properly service undergraduate and graduate programs in English, the department ought to assess the need for additional hires in area of Rhetoric and Professional Writing, particularly in the area of Technical Writing. Of concern is the department's ability to staff ENGL 2050: Introduction to Rhetorical Analysis, which is required of all undergraduate English majors as part of the B.A. Core, as well as the 12 offerings that are part of the B.A. concentration in Rhetoric and Professional Writing. It should be noted, too, that the current 2000-level Technical/Professional Writing offerings serve a number of different departments and are staffed entirely by non-tenure track faculty. A tenured instructor in this area would offer stability and expertise and allow the UTC English Department to do the sort of training that is already done in the freshman composition program. Additionally, preliminary conversations between the Department of English and faculty in the Rollins College of Business has produced interest in a 3000-level professional writing course for their majors that builds off the 2000-level introduction. A hire in this area would allow the department to create and offer such a course and others like it.

2. Tenure-Track Hiring: Department Writing Outreach Coordinator/Writing Across the Curriculum Specialist

As with my visit five years ago, several conversations during my site visit this time involved discussion of opportunities for the department to reach out across the university community through its writing program. Initiatives such as certificates in professional writing and coordinating campus writing (to name only two) point to the need for a position that could take shape as either a Department Writing Outreach Coordinator or a Writing Across the Curriculum specialist. We have both at my home institution, Eastern Michigan University. The Outreach Coordinator seeks opportunities to develop course sequences and certificates for departments looking to incorporate professional writing into their programming. The Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) program at Eastern Michigan University strives to develop a cohesive writing experience for students throughout their academic experience at the university. Our WAC director helps faculty in all disciplines use writing effectively in their classes and assists programs with integrating writing and taking a systematic approach to writing instruction throughout curricula.

I believe that the hiring of an Outreach Coordinator and/or a WAC specialist would be an invaluable resource for the department and university as the English Department seeks to boost enrollment and build relationships across campus by offering needed programming in professional writing. That said, there is always a danger in viewing the English Department at UTC (or at any other institution, including my own) as simply an accessory to other programs and majors. This perspective fails to take advantage of the real potential for growth both in the department, but also in the college and university. So caution and thoughtful consideration must be exercised moving forward.

3. Tenure Track Hiring: Replacement Hiring

Recent faculty separations (including a specialist in twentieth-century and diversity literature specialist just this spring) has generated considerable discussion across the department about hiring priorities. Literature faculty expressed concern about gaps in period coverage due to the lack of specialists in certain key areas; Creative Writing faculty are experiencing difficulty providing adequate mentorship through capstone experiences because of growing student numbers in their program; Rhetoric and Professional Writing faculty see opportunities for growth given upper administrative interest in promoting the program for recruiting purposes to outside constituencies. I recommend strongly that the department engage in a strategic conversation across disciplines about how best to serve the long-term interests, health, and stability of the unit through targeted hiring of specific positions in its three concentration areas and in what order those hires would take place when funding for positions is available.

4. Non-Tenure-Track Relations

Among the most notable improvements since my visit in 2018 has been that many improvements recently to department culture associated with non-tenure-track personnel in the areas of evaluations, departmental input, and office space. While NTT instructors find Dr. McCarthy to be tremendously supportive both professionally and personally, there is concern for having certain safeguards in place, particularly with regard to periodic evaluations, in the future when department administrators are appointed who may or may not be as supportive as the current Head. The problem, as non-tenure-track instructors see it, is that because their workload expectations are tied almost entirely to instruction, the tenure-track evaluation forms--which assess the areas of teaching, research, and service--do not properly evaluate non-tenure-track performance in relation to expectations. Therefore, I recommend that the department develop a separate evaluation form for non-tenure-track instructors (similar to the NTAR recently piloted by the English Department) that better reflects their responsibilities within the department.

5. Undergraduate Program Learning Outcomes

The Undergraduate and Graduate Programs Review (2019-2022) documents the process by which the department recognized and began to revise student learning outcomes (SLOs) for the three tracks in the undergraduate major. Those efforts were hampered by the pandemic but have started to move forward again with the help of Gerda Zinner, the English Department's assigned advisor in The Hub Student Success Center. My conversations with faculty during this visit suggest that the department and its programming would benefit greatly from continued reflection about and revisions to SLOs, especially with regard to courses in the B.A. core.

6. Students: Events and Communication

Student satisfaction with the department, instructors, and classes is very high. The general sentiment among departmental majors is that extracurricular planning since the university emerged from the pandemic has been fantastic. Students noted the mentorship programs and annual banquet as highlights. The only two requests are that the department identify a central location in Lupton Hall to post announcements for students and that faculty continue to expand extracurricular programming.

7. Student Testing (ETS)

Standardized student testing was a concern discussed in the 2019 report but was understandably put on hold during the pandemic. It should be revisited now as campus returns to pre-Covid practices and routines. Graduating seniors in English at the University of Tennessee-Chattanooga are required by THEC to take the ETS Major Field Test one year out of every five-year cycle. The scores are part of the formula used to determine funding from the state. In 2017-2018, UT-C students scored noticeably below the national average (148.40/153.10). Part of the reason for the disappointing results is the fact that only one of the three department tracks appears to prepare students for the literature-based exam. Because so much is at stake with the ETS Major Field Test, I strongly recommend the department and university investigate the possibility of replacing this exam with alternative examination methods that assesses the instruction actually taking place in the Department of English at UT-C or consider testing only students enrolled as majors in the B.A. English, Language and Literature concentration track.

8. Graduate Program

According to the Undergraduate and Graduate Programs Review Report (2019-2022), enrollments in the department's graduate program have remained relatively steady in recent years. I recommend that the university increase its support of department recruiting efforts at the graduate level in at least two ways. First, the university ought to promote graduate programming in the Department of English through local and regional advertising—print, public, and online. Second, the university ought to enhance its support of graduate students with more assistantship lines,

increase funding per line, and offer funding for travel to conferences and research sites.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Joseph Csicsila". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, prominent initial "J".

Joseph Csicsila

Head

Department of English Language and Literature

Eastern Michigan University