

GRADUATE PROGRAM REVIEW

SONOMA STATE UNIVERSITY

Master of Arts in English

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Program Review

Cycle 2014-2021

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A. Program Introduction and History

A.1 Description of Our Program

The Master of Arts degree at SSU provides the choice of three tracks: Literary Criticism, Creative Writing, or English Education/Rhetoric.

Since its inception in 1967, the program has supported a lively community of scholars and writers engaged in dialogues that cross and transcend boundaries of imaginative and theoretical inquiries. The socially active decades of the 60s, the era in which the program was born, shaped the vision of its founders, attracting scholars and students who value a critical vision, who cherish the power of language, and who embrace transformative learning and practices that build toward real-world changes.

The program – in total -- values one-on-one mentoring and faculty-supported, student self-directed, and project-based explorations. Current and prospective students are invited to write themselves into the world by first exploring opportunities in our rich

curriculum, and then by materializing their intellectual endeavors in wide ranging forms: a critical thesis, a curricular development research report, a book-length manuscript, or a digital arts project.

The MA in English at SSU is distinguished by its confluence of three tracks: Literary Criticism, Creative Writing, and Rhetoric/English Education. Students in the program gain the opportunity to explore these three areas of the English studies, balancing specialized skills in reading, writing and teaching, with in-depth exploration of literary histories and critical topics.

The program is designed more specifically for students planning to engage in advanced study for self-development, to teach at a community college, or to enter a doctoral program; for students seeking to develop their skills as creative writers, or to pursue careers in the media or other areas where the capacity to imagine, to communicate, and to analyze critically are integral. Additionally, the program is designed for current high school English teachers seeking to expand their intellectual community and professional development. In short, the program can meet the needs and aspirations of a wide-ranging group of students and their goals.

For decades, the English MA program has served as an important intellectual wellspring. Our graduates pursue further studies or apply their learning to diverse fields. Many of our graduates have chosen to make a career in SSU's Composition Program, helping first year students find their voices, hone their communication skills, and shape their critical thinking habits. We are proud of our graduates' contributions to this endeavor.



Ambrose Nichols and Dorothy Overly



50th Street View Views Past >

SSU 50th Anniversary - Historic Images

1966 - Dirt outside construction of Stevenson Hall

A. 2 History of the Program

The English MA was established in 1967. However, long before Sonoma County had a college campus—when the campus site was merely a field of mustard flowers, when it consisted of only two isolated gray buildings standing alone without any trees to provide shade or walkways to connect them, and when going from one building to the next meant treading through mud in knee boots during the rainy winter months—there existed many mundane and modest dreams of a path to higher education.

This dream was shared by students from all walks of life in the North Bay. The dream was nursed by folk who knew what it meant to dream and who themselves had walked long and diverse roads. Some of them had PhDs but many did not: to name two of the many founding members, Dr. Hector Lee (1908-1992), the working-class folk-tale scholar from the Central Valley, as well as Dr. Dorothy Overly (19??-1983), the flamboyant spirit calling for late night mural painting on campus buildings. These and many scholar-educators not only devoted their life to building this program but also left behind memorial scholarships for English majors. From these and many founding members, generations of scholar-educators have poured their hearts and minds into nurturing the newer generations.

A Note on Institutional Memory: The year 1967. The river of intellectual lineages often does not exist only on paper. Truth be told, when I started drafting this first ever program review for the English MA at SSU during the COVID-19 pandemic, no one really remembers the date and year of the program's inception. It simply wasn't in anyone's living memory. It seemed to its participants to have always existed there since SSU was founded. After scouting the web up and down for days, I finally found this information in a book on the history of Sonoma State College that the SSU library does not itself even happen to own. Thankfully, GoogleBook seems to have saved this history for SSU's English Department's many intellectual miscreants.

The effort of finding the program history continued to this one sunny afternoon . . . Over her favorite pot of Earl Grey, emeritus professor of English, JJ Wilson remarked, "The MA program was part of the plan from the very start, even before the university got its University status. There was a pent-up demand from those in the North Bay who could not go away to attend graduate school. Many of them are women. Some got their only chance to pursue higher education as part of their divorce agreement," between bites of the strawberry pastry baked by her more junior colleague, Chingling Wo (whose words you are reading now). "Divorce agreement?!" I repeated with surprised and misty eyes. And the conversation continued: there were also the young people whose parents never had any formal education, working class youth who missed their first chance, older persons looking for their 2nd chance, and many local teachers seeking an opportunity

to advance their own knowledge and learning. Moreover, “Thaine (former Dean of A&H) says SSU is the school of 2nd chances; I’d say, and 3rd, 4th chances . . .” From JJ’s words to my heart, years have passed but the spirit of empowering students through education and self-actualization remains: we are grateful to be the space that offers students who thirst for the opportunity for higher learning a helping hand, a possibility of building an egalitarian community of learning together in the form of a bridge program.

For years, while active and vibrant, the program has been content with only short, minimalist, program descriptions in the course catalog, and often tagged along with the programmatic description of the B.A. in English, as is exemplified by this excerpt from a flier for the department in the 1970s (this is all we had):

The impetus for recalling the MA program’s history and turning its past into a written paragraph was prompted by the COVID-19 Shelter-in-Place, when it seemed all that was solid melted into the air. Learning about the founding faculties of our program and

MASTEROF ARTS: Consists of 30 units of work which may be distributed according to a student's particular interests. Linguistics creative writing, and world literature, as well as English and American literature, are possible choices for major emphasis. We also *offer* courses in teaching college composition and give the opportunity for students to observe and teach in a junior college program. Both thesis and non-thesis degree options are available. Write to the English Department Graduate Advisor for more specific information.

For further information write to: Chair

English Department

SONOMA STATE COLLEGE

understanding what drove their life-long dedication to this program made visible the invisible inner fires that have been shining within the cohort of faculty and students ever since, over all these years (As the program review designated writer, it was deeply moving to be part of the history of, as well as to witness and live in, these spoken and unspoken but unwavering efforts, through generations and generations of teachers-scholars, for making public education and self-discovery available to students of diverse backgrounds.)

An artifact of the ironic minimalism of our older course catalog from a bygone time can be seen below:

CURRICULUM FOR THE MASTER OF ARTS DEGREE	
(For University requirements see the <i>Graduate Studies Announcement</i>)	
Required:	<i>Units</i>
ENGL 502 Introduction to Critical Analysis.....	3
ENGL 503 Contemporary Language Study	3
ENGL 504 Problems in Language	3
ENGL 505 Problems in Composition	3
ENGL 511 Problems in American Literature	6
ENGL 512 Problems in British Literature.....	6
ENGL 590 Graduate Seminar in English.....	3
Additional units in the ENGL 400 and 500 series, selected with advisory committee approval. At least 3 units must be ENGL 504, 511, or 512	9
Elective units which may be in other disciplines, selected with advisory committee approval.....	9

A. 3 What Distinguishes Our Program?

Aiming to foster a community of scholars and writers engaged in a dialogue that crosses and transcends imaginative and theoretical boundaries, our program is distinguished for its **confluence** of three tracks: Literature Criticism, Creative Writing, and Rhetoric/English Education. Students in the program gain the opportunity to explore these three rich areas of English studies, balancing specialized skills in reading, writing, and teaching with in-depth exploration of literary histories and critical topics.

The program encourages students to understand the power of language and find their own voices by exploring opportunities in our curriculum, by building community with their peers, by finding mentors among the English department's graduate faculty, and by participating fully in the life of the department. In particular, thanks to ongoing faculty efforts, as well as the insights of our recent hires, the program has recently expanded in areas of culture-sustaining pedagogy, the use of grading contracts, and anti-racist pedagogy. (Dr. Megan McIntyre, one of the contributors to this focused curricular development, has left the program for the University of Arkansas in the summer of 2022. We lament the loss of such a talented scholar and colleague).

Core Courses

Students in the program take one research and methodology course (ENGL500), at least two literary studies seminars, and at least one writing workshop, (ENGL530) and/or a rhetoric/composition seminar (ENGL 587). The core courses provide a graduate-level foundation for students to build and enrich their specialized area of learning, be it creative expression, literary criticism, or rhetoric and writing instruction.

Track-Specific Courses

In addition to the (above) core courses, students in all three tracks develop their expertise through track-specific course works (as follows):

Creative Writing Track

Creative writing workshops and one-on-one directed writing are the two important modes for learning and craft development for students in the Creative Writing track. ENGL530 – Creative Writing Workshop – offers students the chance to challenge themselves by modeling the style of established authors, witnessing how their peers develop as writers, and accruing feedback on their own writing from multiple perspectives. The Creative Writing track students typically take ENGL530 – The Multi-genre workshops – in both their first and 2nd Fall semester, in addition to ENGL535 – Directed Writing – every year. While ENGL530 provides the workshop experience in a cohort setting, ENGL535 allows students to work with professors

one-on-one and hone their writing skills in preparation for their cumulative project — their creative thesis.

English Education/Rhetoric Track

Students in the English Education/Rhetoric track typically build their self-directed, faculty-advised study plan drawing from a diverse set of courses: [ENGL 587 Seminar: Rhetorical Theory](#), ENGL595 Special Studies, and appropriate 400-level courses from the English Education tracks. Many of the students in English Education/Rhetoric track value the experience of teaching first-year composition with a select cohort of students from other tracks. Many of them develop their thesis research projects related to the experience. We look forward to more curriculum development in this track—on politics of language, and anti-racist pedagogy-- thanks to new faculty members recently hired.

Currently, [ENGL 587 - Seminar: Rhetorical Theory](#), one of the program's core courses, offers the theory and know-how for developing composition instructors in the capacity of being a Teaching Associate.

Literature Criticism Track

Students in Literature Criticism track received a range of exposure on different periods, themes, topics, and critical approaches from the three literary seminars offered every year. Literary Criticism track students are expected to take all of the literary seminars offered to gain knowledge and familiarity on various periods and topics. Students build their thesis project by expanding what they learn in one seminar or by building synergy between seminars. In the process of taking literature seminars, students may develop their cumulative project by exploring shared themes across different seminars or utilize Special Studies to delve deeper into the subject area of their interest. (The cultivation of a culture in which students can work with professors one-on-one without having taken courses with them is also fostered; such a culture provides an essential balance to the yearly rotation of courses.)

A. 4 Faculty Specializations and Alignment to Program Curriculum, Mission, and Quality

Faculty members' dedication and love for the discipline are foundational to the success of the program. Faculty at the English MA program are active teacher-scholars and creative writers.

Creative Writing Track

Professor Gillian Conoley, our Poet in Residence, continues her amazing work as a poet as she nears the end of her thirty year tenure with our department. Her most recent collection, *A Little More Red Sun on the Human*, was published in 2020, the eighth volume of poetry she has published amongst numerous other works. Her poetry has been included in the influential *Postmodern American Poetry: A Norton Anthology* (second edition, 2013). In recognition of her longstanding excellence as a poet, Professor Conoley received the Percy Shelley Memorial Award from the Poetry Society of America in recognition of a body of work at mid-career, on March 29, 2017. (Note: Professor Gillian Conoley has retired from the department in the summer of 2023 after the self-study document was completed.)

Dr. Anne Goldman is a dual track in the department having come to our program in 1998 as a scholar in American and Chicana/o literature. She won the prestigious Bernie Goldstein campus award for her excellence in scholarship. Since then, she has migrated to the teaching of Creative Nonfiction. Her fiction and nonfiction have appeared in such venues as the *Gettysburg Review*, *Southwest Review*, *Tin House* and *The Georgia Review*. Goldman's essays have been cited as notable in the *Best American Essays* and the *Best American Travel Writing* and have received honorable mention in the Pushcart Prize; "Stargazing in the Atomic Age" was nominated for a National Magazine Award.

Professor Stefan Kiesbye continues his prolific and distinguished work in fiction, publishing novels, novellas and stories throughout his career and since joining the faculty at Sonoma State in 2016. In recent years, his cyber-punk novel *Berlinges* appeared in 2018. *No Sound to Break, No Moment Clear* (2022) was the winner of the 2020 Brighthorse Prize for the Novel. His latest book, *But I Don't Know You* is a meditation on belonging, identity, memory, and on the stories we tell ourselves and others about who we were and who we have become. His stories, essays, and reviews have appeared in the *Wall Street Journal*, *Publishers Weekly*, and the *Los Angeles Times*, among others. His first book, *Next Door Lived a Girl*, won the Low Fidelity Press Novella Award, and has been translated into German, Dutch, and Spanish

The expertise and dedication of our Creative Writing Faculty is well-aligned with our program curriculum and program. As two of our colleagues in this track have entered the FERP program, Miah Jeffra, whose writing and pedagogy interweave dance, drama, visual arts, queer writing, decolonial and cultural studies, has become part of the English MA program. He began teaching ENGL535 Directed Writing as an adjunct instructor in Fall 2021. Miah Jeffra brings much-needed representation of queer studies and the experiences of empowering creative writers of color. During his time with the English MA, Miah Jeffra has consistently impressed and inspired students from diverse backgrounds.

(Note: The department was able to hire Miah Jeffra as a visiting assistant professor in 2023-2024. Miah Jeffra is highly marketable but has been willing to take a pay cut for his love of our program and students. The English MA program would really appreciate a TT position to be opened up, so the program can attract highly impactful teachers vital to our program's survival, such as Miah Jeffra.)

Literature Criticism Track

Dr. Brantley Bryant's research and teaching interests include later medieval literature, Geoffrey Chaucer and his contemporaries, interdisciplinary approaches to literature and history, women's writing, the history of sexuality, intersections of medieval literature and popular culture, public outreach on behalf of literary studies, and recent developments in "posthuman" approaches to literature. His current long-term project is a book on representations of water in late medieval literature. Recent publications & scholarly work include "Accounting for Affect in the *Reeve's Tale*," in *Medieval Affect, Feeling, and Emotion*. Ed. Glenn D. Burger and Holly A. Crocker. Cambridge University Press, 2019. 118-137; and Founder, editorial collective, with Candace Barrington, Richard H. Godden, Daniel T. Kline, and Myra Seaman. *The Open Access Companion to the Canterbury Tales*. 2017.

Professor Kim Hester Williams' scholarly research concerns racial representation in nineteenth-century literature and contemporary popular culture and visual representations of race in film and new media. Dr. Hester Williams is co-editor of a collection of interdisciplinary essays on race and environment, *Racial Ecologies* (2018). The book collection includes a chapter she authored titled, "Earthseeds of Change: Post-Apocalyptic Mythmaking, Race, and Ecology in *The Book of Eli* and Octavia Butler's Womanist Parables." She has also published essays on the representation of race, gender and economy in new media, popular culture, and film.

Professor John Kunat's research areas lie in Renaissance and Cultural Studies, focusing on issues of race, gender and cultural interaction in the Early Modern Period. He has recently published articles on Shakespeare in influential journals, first "Play me false": Rape, Race, and Conquest in "The Tempest" in the *Shakespeare Quarterly*, (Fall 2014); and then "Rape and Republicanism in Shakespeare's 'Lucrece,'" *Studies in English literature, 1500-1900*, (2015).

Professor Tim Wandling has presented or published papers on Lord Byron, Thomas Hardy, J.S. Mill, and the teaching of Social Protest literature. In 2019, he presented the

paper “‘Fierce Loves’ and Romantic Ironies: Joni Mitchell and Lord Byron” at the International Conference on Romanticism in Manchester England. His current book project, *Living Romanticism*, addresses connections between 19th C. Romantic Poets and 1970s Singer Songwriters.

Dr. Chingling Wo’s recent research focuses on the intersection between capitalism as an economic system and the colonial structure of feeling. She is currently working on the formation of sentimentality in 18th century literature of Britain and Qing China. She is also interested in using the invasive apple snail in Asian rice paddies to develop new ways of theorizing global space, and has published an article on this topic, “In What Form Does Global Capital Flow Leave Behind Memories? The Story of the Apple Snail Caught Between the Green Revolution and the Organic Food Movement.” *ASIA Network Exchange: A Journal for Asian Studies in the Liberal Arts* 22.2 (2015). Her recent teaching interest is on literary representation of plague as well as the social justice dimension of mourning.

English Education/ Rhetoric Track

Dr. Theresa Burruel Stone’s research emphasizes the histories, narratives, and politics of place in order to underscore connections between social practices and material relations. Her recent work examines the intersection between schooling, ideologies of educational uplift, Latinx racialization and vulnerability to racialized violence, settler colonialism, and landscapes of racial violence in the United State. She has presented her scholarship at the conferences of the American Educational Research Association, American Anthropological Association’s Council on Anthropology and Education, Critical Race Studies in Education Association, Latinx Studies Association, and International Congress of Qualitative Inquiry. They are the recipient of the AERA Latinx Research Issues SIG’s 2020 Dissertation Award and the International Association of Qualitative Inquiry’s 2021 Illinois Qualitative Dissertation Award. Dr. Burruel Stone was selected as a 2021 CAE Concha Delgado Gaitán Presidential Fellow. She is honored to be part of the National Council of Teachers of English Research Foundation’s Cultivating New Voices among Scholars of Color 2022-2024 cohort.

Dr. Jennifer Johnson’s work is dedicated to leveraging culturally-sustaining-responsive and critical pedagogies, new literacies, debate, and Hip-Hop culture, to cultivate literacies of access and liberation in secondary schools, teaching preparation programs, and college courses in rhetoric, linguistics, and composition. This work grounds their research and creative activity, which has been featured in domestic and international publications. Papers on collaborative curricular redesign (with Dr. Burruel Stone) have recently been accepted for publication in *Research in the Teaching of English*

Designing majors and A DIY guide to faculty-led, student-focused curricular reform (forthcoming).

Beyond the above-mentioned tenure-line faculty members, adjunct lecturer Dr. Anthony Rizzuto, is a central part of the English MA's teaching associate cohort program.

Currently serving as the Program Director of SSU's Composition program, Dr. Rizzuto has been teaching the ENGL503 [Practice in Teaching College Composition](#) since Spring 2023. Dr. Anthony Rizzuto is an amazing generalist capable of mounting literature courses in a wide range of periods and topics. He is also a seasoned teacher in college writing as well as California ethnic literature. Dr. Rizzuto has published a monograph on Raymond Chandler, Romantic Ideology, and the Cultural Politics of Chivalry (Palgrave Macmillan 2021).

(All English Department faculty members cherish the opportunity to teach in the English MA program. The faculty section of the MA program review is excerpted and modified from the English Department Program Review of the current review cycle.)

Size of Faculty and Urgency for New Hires

Size of Faculty: At the beginning of this review cycle (2014-2020), we had 13 tenure-line faculty members at the English Department. Yet, by 2024, we would be reduced to only 6 tenure-line members.

Structural Changes in Response to Fewer Faculty

At the beginning of this review cycle (2014-2020), all 13 tenure-line faculty members at the English Department were actively part of the English MA program. It has been a tradition that faculty members of the English Department are all very passionate about the Master's program; many were attracted to the department because it enabled them to work with students at both the undergraduate and graduate levels. As such, tenure-line faculty members of the English Department also serve as faculty members for the English MA. As a small program, we have, over the years, balanced traditional literary period-based representation amongst our faculty members, with strong commitment to current, innovative approaches and contents. For a further analysis and assessment of our Department's strong commitment to current and innovative approaches, please see "Diversity" in the Curriculum section of this program review.

All of the traditional period-based structures of British Literature (Medieval, Renaissance, 18th century, Romanticism and Victorianism, Modernism) are represented

by the expertise of Literature track faculty members. On the American Literature side of the Literature track, we currently have two excellent faculty members, Dr. Kim Hester-Williams and Dr. Ann Goldman. Both faculty members teach across disciplines (Dr. Hester-Williams teaches one course per semester in the American Multicultural Studies program and Dr. Goldman teaches one course per semester in the Creative Writing track). Our program has a strong demand for American Literature courses, and we very much hope to meet this demand by having at least one new hire in contemporary American Literature. Overall, beyond our need for an American Literature hire, as of the beginning of this review cycle, we have a rather balanced traditional literary period-based representation amongst our faculty members, with strong commitment to current, innovative approaches and contents.

Yet, during this review cycle, we experience a wave of retirements without replacement hires in all three tracks: Noelle Oxenhandler, non-fiction writer; Dr. Thaine Stearns, British Modernism; Gillian Conoley, Poetry –in addition to the departure of Dr. Megan McIntyre, Composition-Rhetoric. Meanwhile, Dr. Anne Goldman whose expertise is in both American Literature and creative writing, Dr. Scott Miller, whose expertise is Composition-Rhetoric, and Dr. John Kunat, whose expertise is in Renaissance Literature, have all been in various stages of FERPing. The retirement of these faculty members leaves all three tracks in need of new hires to ensure programmatic integrity and a smooth generational transition for faculty members. Without new hires, by 2024, we will be reduced to only 6 tenure-line faculty members.

Our program is highly committed to keeping our curricula resilient and innovative, utilizing the expertise of our remaining faculty members, **yet two timely new hires, one in Creative Writing and one in Contemporary American Literature, would really allow us to remain competitive with other outstanding regional MA programs in English.** These new hires would also help SSU avert the danger of structurally weakening a reputationally strong program like ours from disappearing from the map, keeping alive the life's work that three generations of scholar-teachers have poured into the program.

Student Cohort Size

The program's incoming cohort size varies from 5 to 20 students per year, depending on the year. A basic inquiry into the cohort size found the variation seems rather random, with the cohort size tending to average out within a two-year cycle. For example, a cohort size of 5 in 2018-19 is followed by a cohort size of 21 in 2019-20, and then a

cohort size of 8 in 2020-21. The funding structure has been the most important factor in limiting the size of our MA cohort; the program depends on the English Department faculty WTUs. Faculty time invested in Special Studies or Thesis supervision are not compensated; instead these count towards the faculty members' overload (which is capped) without salary impact. While this compensation structure will certainly limit the program's growth, it also allows for the resilience of the MA program against cohort fluctuations, budgetary shortfalls, and national downward trends in graduate admissions within the Arts and Humanities.

Potential program applicants view the three tracks as a key feature that distinguishes our program from other English MA programs in the region, particularly for our emphasis on confluence. Sonoma State's suburban setting allows for both access to urban conveniences as well as to bucolic intimacy with diverse landscapes: the ocean, farmland, pastures, vineyards, and to the open "wild."

The English MA program provides training and experience in teaching first-year Composition through the opportunity to participate in the Teaching Associate cohort. Teaching Associates cohort offers a cohort-based model with supervision and support for teacher development. It cultivates the ability to use socially just, culturally sustaining, and anti-racist pedagogies in actual classroom settings. Dr. Megan McIntyre (since Fall 2019) and Dr. Anthony Rizzuto (since summer 2022) have served as mentors for our MA Teaching Associate cohort.

Over the years, Statements of Purpose and other artifacts of student expression reveal that the main reasons why students are attracted to our MA program are: a desire for self-development and self-actualization (60%); a motivation for career path development and preparation (30%); interest in a confluence of multiple tracks offered by the program (50%); and preparation for further advanced studies (20%). Most applicants/students convey their passion for literature and their love for analysis and writing in more general terms, suggesting that they want the program to be a space to continue the trajectory of personal development started during their undergraduate years. This point is particularly true for those MA students who obtained their BA at SSU.

The confluence between different tracks is an especially key point of attraction to the program as it is held by 50% of our students. For students in the Literary Criticism or Creative Writing tracks, they particularly appreciate that our program offers the opportunity to be trained for college-level composition instruction. Students also cite the benefits of being able to access Literature seminars with Creative Writing courses as another point of attraction.

Close knit, one-on-one mentorship is an aspect of our program that appeals to our students and potential applicants and which is apparent in our admitted student cohort. On their MA thesis acknowledgement page, we often find our program graduates crediting more than their first and second readers, here are a few sample acknowledgements:

Acknowledgment

Sakina Bryant (2013)

I wish to thank the following in the Sonoma State University English Department: Prof. Cathy Kroll, my indomitable thesis advisor, and Prof. Anne Goldman, my gracious second reader; Prof. Greta Vollmer for her translation assistance; Prof. Timothy Wandling, the current Director of Graduate Studies, for his unflinching support. To Dean Thaine Stearns, I also offer my special share of gratitude. I also wish to express my thanks to others in the English Department who have helped me in different ways throughout my academic journey: Prof. Kim Hester-Williams, Prof. Scott Miller, Prof. Chingling Wo, and Emeritus Prof. Helen Dunn (for everything). Lastly, I remember the late Prof. Robert Coleman-Senghor in my acknowledgements.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS by Lean Johnson (2016)

I am indebted to Dr. Brantley L. Bryant and Dr. Catherine Kroll for giving me their time, support, and insight. My sincerest thanks to my thesis advisor, Dr. Bryant, whose support, understanding, and (seemingly infinite) patience helped this thesis come to life. It was Dr. Bryant's enthusiasm that initially fostered my interest in medieval literature, so being able to work with him on this project was an especially rewarding experience. During each stage of the writing process, I could always count on him to provide me with thoughtful suggestions, comments, and questions to consider. I am also grateful to my second reader, Dr. Catherine Kroll, for all of her helpful comments and revision notes. I loved being in Dr. Kroll's Gothic literature classes, and wish I could have taken more courses with her. It was an honor to learn from, and work with, these incredible professors.

Thank you to the SSU English department staff and faculty, but especially:

Dr. John Kunat, for all of the expertise, advice, and support he has given to me over the years. He is truly a brilliant instructor, and an even kinder individual. Dr. Kim Hester Williams, whose energetic, thoughtful, and creative approach to reading and analyzing literature still inspires me. Dr. Anne Goldman, for her support and for assigning the Adrienne Rich article (which inspired a new direction for this thesis). Dr. Chingling Wo, who introduced me to new ideas and schools of thought. I'm also grateful for her kindness during my first year of the M.A. program.

My SSU cohort deserves some appreciation for all of the odd conversations, complaining sessions, and enlightening classroom discussions. Thank you for making each day interesting!

Acknowledgements

by Janice F. Turner (2021)

There were many people who allowed me to stand on their shoulders so that I might gain a better view of the universe. Thank you all for pushing me upward and never once letting my feet touch the ground.

I would like to thank my thesis advisors Professor Stefan Kiesbye and Dr. Anne Goldman of the Sonoma State University English Department. You both have patiently waded through the various iterations of my stories, offering advice and counsel.

Thank you, Dr. Chingling Wo, Sonoma State Graduate Coordinator. Each time I doubted myself you have been somewhere in the background insisting that I already had everything I needed to ensure my own success.

I would also like to thank Dr. Kim Hester Williams who gave me the gift of reading deeply the works of Tony Morrison and Herman Melville. What you taught me extends well beyond the ability to look behind the words on the page.

I would like to send heart-felt gratitude to Dr. Peter Blakemore, Professor Susan Nordlof and Professor David Holper at College of the Redwoods in Humboldt County. Thank you all for believing in me, even during periods when I doubted myself.

Acknowledgments

by Erica Calderon(2021)

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A.5 Highlights of Our Program (Recap)

- ❖ Three tracks and confluence of different areas of English Studies.
- ❖ Opportunity for training and actual experiences in teaching college composition.
- ❖ Opportunities for participating in editorial work of literary magazines and Writers on Writing event planning (decreased during the pandemic).
- ❖ Literature professors representing different periods; strength in ecocritical, posthumanism, and critical race theories.
- ❖ Professors' expertise in Early and Later American Literature.
- ❖ Area/period coverage in British Literature: Medieval, Renaissance, the Enlightenment (18th century), Romanticism and 19th century, Modernism.
- ❖ Anti-racist, social justice pedagogy; culturally sustaining pedagogy; Latinx feminism.
- ❖ Outstanding Creative Writing professors, with active publication records, in poetry, the novel, and non-fiction (especially memoir).

A.6 The Purpose of this Self Study: Understanding Our History and Envisioning Our Future

Program Statistics – Fall 2016 to Fall 2020

The English MA program's student body is typically around 70% female and around 70% non-traditional and returning students. In this review cycle, between Fall 16 to Fall 20, the program saw in our student demographics meaningful increases in underrepresented minorities (from 12% to 25%) as well as an increase in first generation students (from 20.5% to 37%). The data evidences our program's effort in enhancing student support, faculty diversity, curriculum development and intentional promotion of a student-centered learning environment have effectively manifested quantitatively and qualitatively.

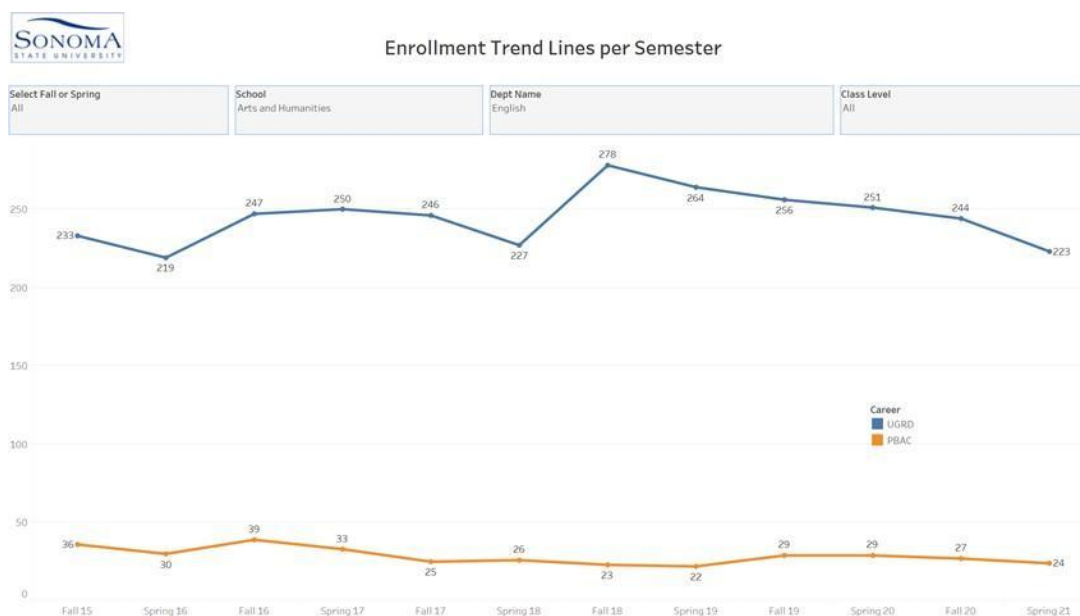
Chart 1: Trends in Demographics for Students in SSU's English Master's Program

Characteristic	Fall 16	Fall 18	Fall 20	Sp 21
Female	69.2%	73.9%	70.4%	70.8%

Underrepresented Minority (URM) ¹	12.8%	17.4%	25.9%	29.2%
First-Generation to College ²	20.5%	21.7%	37.0%	33.3%
21-24 age range	23.1%	34.8%	25.9%	29.2%
Full Time	43.6%	47.8%	70.4%	29.2%

1. **Ethnic minority** (also underrepresented minority) is comprised of traditionally underrepresented racial or ethnic groups including Hispanic/Latinx, Black/African American, American Indian/Alaskan Native, and Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander.
2. **First generation** includes students who are the first in their family to attend college or to receive a college degree.

Chart 2: Enrollment Trends From Fall 2015 through Spring 2021



The ratio between English undergraduate and graduate level courses is visualized by Chart 3.

Chart 3: Number (head count) of the English Department's graduate enrollments compared with undergraduate enrollments

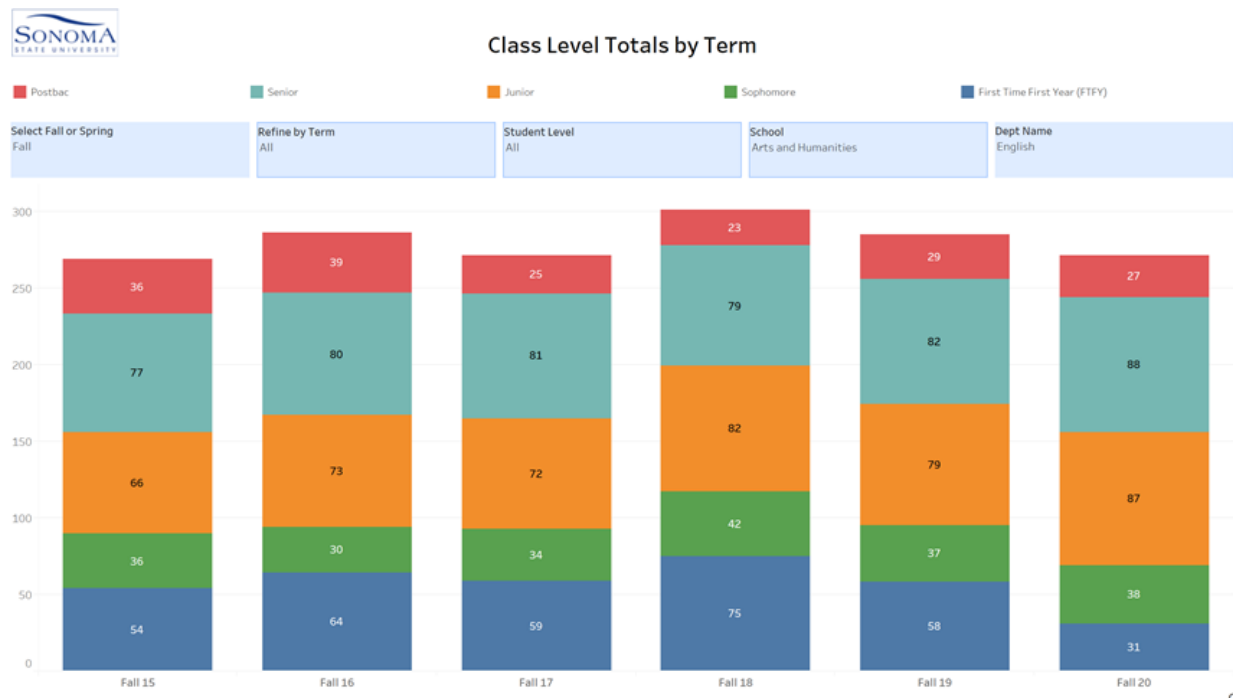


Chart 2 and Chart 3 make visible how the English MA program plays a pivotal and unique role within the overarching student population of English majors, writ large. The existence of the English MA adds “curb appeal” to the English major, giving BA students the aspiration for advanced learning in English and other relevant disciplines in the school of Arts and Humanities, which lends value and a deeper liberal arts commitment (if not patina) to the whole university, which is the only COPLAC institution within the CSU campus.

Additionally, the English MA program holds a commitment to language as a space for identity-based inquiry and a praxis of empowerment rather than to cede ground to linguistic colonialist impulses. We find ways to cherish the intrinsic nature of language as an expression of ones’ self and culture, where the inward experience of being human is subsequently expressed by the specific and situated humans interested in our MA program, particularly the desire to use language as a modality or tool for personal, cultural, and social investigation, expression, expansion, and growth. This is evident in the below:

An excerpt from applicant's Statement of Purpose:

I've always been uncomfortable expressing myself. Part of that comes from the forced assimilation I've faced throughout the years. When I was younger I would willingly accept a more White-centric personality and environment. At times, my high school peers referred to me as "one of the good ones," which implied that I was a "good Mexican" because I assimilated to the larger White/American culture. It is my goal that by exploring the English Education/Rhetoric field I want to investigate the intersection of language, race, and local cultures. Particularly as they relate to education systems like public schools and universities. This interest has been shaped by my own experience with forced assimilation, which began when I was younger and willingly adopted a more White-centric personality and environment. Looking back, I realize that this assimilation was not always genuine, and was often driven by a desire to fit in and be seen as a "good Mexican." I see this as an opportunity to investigate my growing interest in the impact of language and culture on marginalized communities like my own.

University Mission

SSU cares about the mission to make education within the reach of more students and to afford students more ways to excel, as its [mission statement](#) encapsulates: "Sonoma State is a regionally serving public university committed to educational access and excellence. Guided by our core values and driven by a commitment to the liberal arts and sciences, Sonoma State delivers high-quality education through innovative programs that leverage the economic, cultural, and natural resources of the North Bay."

To give common folks a better chance to succeed through higher education, SSU's core values furthermore include these key areas: "Diversity & Social Justice," "Sustainability & Environmental Inquiry," "Connectivity & Community Engagement," "Adaptability & Responsiveness." In [SSU's 2018-2025 Strategic Plan document](#), the roadmap for SSU in the current and coming years include: "Student Success," "Academic Excellence," "Leadership Cultivation," and "Transformative Learning." The MA in English carries out these core values and priorities in our programmatic ethos, curriculum, and program, as we have explored throughout this document.

Moreover, in 2021, in a verbal exchange, we gathered the sense that representatives from WASC recommended that SSU graduate-level program review efforts emphasize these focal points:

- Graduate level assessment—explain how we nurture a culture of graduate assessment
- Continue to incorporate program review within the context of our institutional learning objectives
- Overcome weaknesses in our program review due to a lack of data tools.

The English MA has come a long way in building and deepening a culture of assessment. Since our last program review (which was a blended view of the MA and BA in English), the English MA has been engaged in ongoing program self-reflection and assessment, building a culture of graduate assessment by having retreats, focus groups, and curriculum evaluation. These efforts help our program nurture a culture of programmatic and curricular reflections. This review will focus on the programmatic reflective changes in the areas of the program's qualifying exam, programmatic milestones, and curricular alignment with the English Department MA program's learning objectives.

We have developed program specific learning objectives that realize SSU's core values. We have assessed one of our core courses, English 500, using English MA learning objectives. We put ourselves on a programmatic development trajectory that is mindful of our program specific learning objectives.

We overcame data limitations reflectively. As a small program, the institutional data is not always statistically significant. We have used formal and informal data tools, while emphasizing a small program's ability to check in with its members. We continue to find reflective retreats and informal focus groups and conversations less hierarchical and give student-scholars more agency and ownership of the English MA program. We find joy, power, innovation and continuous regeneration when non-traditional tools can be part of our program assessment culture; this includes, factoring in applicants' Statement of Purpose, or our students' acknowledgement page in their thesis, etc.

In the following section of the program review document (section B), we will explain steps we have taken in ensuring student success by

1. Reforming the qualifying exam
2. Consolidation of culminating experience
3. Setting up milestones for a clear path of progression

Section C highlights faculty's efforts particularly in finding ways to carry out and realize SSU core values concerning "Diversity & Social Justice," "Sustainability & Environmental Inquiry."

Section D discusses the assessment of English 500, a core course for the English MA.

Section E analyzes and teases out the larger implications of the quantitative and qualitative data in the Graduate Student Survey conducted by SSU's Graduate School Office.

Altogether, section B, C, D, and E illustrate our efforts and reflections regarding engaging the program and students in a culture of assessment.

B. Assessment and Findings

B1. Learning Goals and Outcomes

The English Master's Program specific learning outcomes are as follow:

1. Demonstrate advanced critical and analytical reading skills.
2. Utilize sound methodologies (including textual analysis, application of critical theory, academic research, and/or qualitative methods) for investigating questions in English studies.
3. Articulate a critical understanding of language and its relationship to power.
4. In reading, writing, and/or analysis of texts, demonstrate recognition of centuries of injustice based on intersecting categories of race or ethnicity, gender identity, sexual orientation, age, dis/ability, home language, religious beliefs, and/or immigration status.
5. Write effectively, considering audience, context, and purpose, as well as the relevant protocols for compiling and disseminating one's scholarly or creative work.
6. Develop a distinctive voice and perspective, writing with attention to the rhythms and nuances of language, whether as a scholar or a creative writer.

B.2 Alignment of our assessment efforts with data collected by institutional research

From 2014 to 2020, our program saw the two-year graduation rate stabilize to around 50%; a more diverse student body (we started to attract Asian, Black, Latinx and multiracial students; students of diverse sexual orientation and gender identification; students with disability). We saw students experiencing a stronger sense of community and a stronger sense of their own progression through the program.

Explanation Concerning Graduation Rate: Beyond Numbers

True to SSU's commitment to education access and diversified sense of excellence, our program considers the current 50% two-year graduation rate to be healthy and desirable. As a program, we have maintained a balanced attitude toward student's academic progress. Our commitment to access allows us to admit and appreciate prospective students with very different goals, disciplinary training, backgrounds, and expectations than the usual student who is measured in terms of the desired graduation rate set by CSU of two years. Many attend the program part-time and they are told by the program coordinator to not judge themselves by the number of years they take to graduate but rather that they may go through the program at the pace they need or desire. We are delighted that our comprehensive and thoughtful reform measures have increased our two-year graduation rate to 50%, though our goals are not to chase after the numbers but to maintain a culture of support and accommodation for students' diverse learning and life conditions. We also appreciate that the SSU administration and faculty governance structure have always allowed such a sense of openness and a flexible attitude towards our program and its uniqueness.

Our program's concerns and focus are more properly considered in light of our ongoing dialogue and reflection that the Department has about ourselves. Indeed, in the process of acculturation into the ethos of program review and assessment, we have incorporated, invented, and discovered tools that are helpful to our self study. Since the last program review (2014), the Department has had several annual retreats each Spring semester; during these retreats, several essential discussions came up about the M.A. program, which include: the qualifying exam (re: assessment of the exam's role in the program and its format), a consolidation of graduation options (re: removing the exam option), setting up milestones for a clear path of student progression, the timely

identification of thesis topics and appropriate thesis readers, and relaunching English 588, *The Politics of Language*, amongst other rich and generative dialogue.

B.2a Changes in the Qualifying Exam (assessment of the exam's role in the program and its format)

Before the reform, the qualifying exam took the form of a one-hour oral exam. Students taking the exam would prepare by studying texts from the qualifying exam list. They studied either on their own or in study groups. When the examinees felt ready, the past graduate coordinator would set up a time for the oral exam and faculty members would volunteer to serve as examiners (see, for example, Kafka, *The Trial*). Several factors prompted our program to shift from the oral exam mode to the written exam mode. Decision on this shift was based on discussion during the department retreats in 2015 and 2016. Follow-up discussion on the implementation of a new mode was carried out in the 2016 and 2017 retreats.

The Oral Qualifying Exam as a Psychological Hurdle: Assessment of student experiences preparing and taking the qualifying exam have been conducted in the form of faculty reflections and informal student focus groups. Students voiced concerns over oral exams being anxiety-provoking and less accommodating to students who have various disabilities and were from historically underprivileged groups. Students also expressed wishes to see more diverse authors—particularly female authors—represented in the qualifying exam reading list, which had been fairly traditionally canonical up until that point.

Additionally, the reduction in tenure-line faculty members made scheduling the exam logistically challenging. This challenge was exacerbated by the uneven teacher-student ratio between tracks.

Outcome: Starting in 2018, the program changed the qualifying exam from a one-hour oral exam to a three-hour written exam.

As indicated in the Chart 4 Graduation Rate, in 2016, the year the program started our programmatic reform of the qualifying exam, we saw a significant jump of two-year graduation rates. And starting from Fall 2017, the year we concluded various reform measures, the program saw a steady 50% two-year graduation rate, a significant difference from the low graduation rate of 22.2% and 9.1% shown in 2012 and 2013.

Chart 4: Graduation Rates

The table below provides the graduation rates (in 2 years or more) by starting cohort:

Percent of starting cohort who graduated in	F 2012	F 2013	F 2014	F 2015	F 2016	F 2017	F 2018	F 2019
2 Years	22.2%	9.1%	45.5%	57.1%	88.9%	50.0%	53.3%	52.9%
More than 2 years	33.3%	27.3%	27.3%	28.6%	11.1%	25.0%	26.7%	5.9%

As a program, we are proud of the impact our comprehensive reform has had on the two-year graduation rate. As described by this document, this is an outcome we labored to achieve. Yet we are concerned that such improvement will erode as we lose more faculty members.

B.2b. Consolidation of Graduation Options (Removing the Culminating Exam Option)

Following suggestions from our previous external reviewer regarding the need to streamline the descriptions of the three tracks (Creative Writing, Literature Criticism, & Single Subject/Composition-Rhetoric), the English MA removed the culminating exam option from the program's manual. It does remain available for students on a case-by-case basis, in extenuating situations. This allows the three tracks to all have a similar culminating experience—a thesis project.

From informal conversations that the program coordinator had with the students, we gathered that this change deepens students' ability to see the three tracks as interconnected while also correcting the misperception regarding the academic rigors of different tracks. Previously, students were sometimes resistant to core courses. By having a similar program trajectory and culminating projects students have gained

stronger identification with core courses and our overall programmatic mission. These are benefits we did not anticipate when first making this change.

B.2c Develop a Clear Sense of Progression

Part of the English MA culture of assessment is the change in the way we set up our program milestones. We broke down students' progression in the program into several milestones:

1. Taking the qualifying exam (recommended, in February of the 2nd semester in the program)
2. Set up a thesis committee and a thesis proposal (recommended, in April of the 2nd semester)
3. Apply for the Teaching Associate cohort for those interested in pursuing professional development and experience in teaching (March of the 2nd semester)
4. Develop a research agenda and a thesis project (summer after the 2nd semester).

Articulating these milestones, particularly in helping most of the students to prepare and take the qualifying exam by February of the first year, has helped students to better focus on their thesis project development, research, and writing.

In the next program review cycle, we look forward to having focus groups and informal dialogues with our students to further develop support for students during the thesis project completion stage.

C. Highlights of Faculty (compiled and written by Dr. Anne Goldman)

C. 1 Exploration of Diversity in Faculty Research

C.2 Exploring Diversity in Faculty Courses

C.3 Ongoing Reinventions of the Teaching of Difference

The English Department at Sonoma State has long made diversity a central part of its ongoing review process. With respect to its MA program, the Department has, since its last program review: 1.) strengthened its effort to explore how its faculty define the ways in which their work in and out of the classroom defines diversity; 2). provided itself with a range of pedagogical and methodological approaches to the teaching of difference; 3).

continued to revise the content of the Department's courses; and 4). continued its ongoing commitment to learn how best to speak to and serve a diverse group of students.

C.1 Explorations of Diversity in Faculty Research

The study of English is the study of narrative forms. Storytelling, by its very nature, at once informs and is contingent upon the social relationships it represents. Writers--creative writers, scholars, and those writers who focus upon the teaching of writing to others--all in turn create characters who walk through the worlds they reflect. Because English as a discipline engages in the study of writing and writers, it simultaneously appraises the nature of social relations refracted and reflected through texts. Professor Hester-Williams offers insight into the relation between word and world with reference to the inflections of race when she argues that "American writers have contributed to and in many cases enlarged ... the larger critical conversation about 'race.'"

Many of our faculty were trained in Ethnic and Cultural Studies. Since the last program review, a number of them have published research that foregrounds racial, ethnic, cultural, class, gender, and religious differences. Co-edited with Leilani Nishime, Professor Kim Hester Williams' anthology *Racial Ecologies* won the 2019 Tarla Rai Peterson book award in Environmental Communication. Anne Goldman's 2021 collection *Stargazing in the Atomic Age* foregrounds the work of Jewish immigrants to the United States. Chingling Wo's 2015 article "In What Form Does Global Capital Flow Leave Behind Memories? The Story of the Apple Snail Caught Between the Green Revolution and the Organic Food Movement" provides a case study in the relationship between empire formation and global trade that is a core component of her research. Theresa Burruel Stone's dissertation, an ethnographic project that appraises data from pláticas, interviews, and participant observation, earned the AERA Dissertation of the Year award.

C. 2 Exploring Diversity in Faculty Courses

Taking as a guiding assumption the understanding that the study of writing as a set of practices is informed by the social and political dynamics writing is rooted within, the Department's faculty have for years made explicit their ongoing commitment to exploring difference in the context of the classroom. As a recent illustration, Professor Hester Williams offers the following observation in her graduate 582 seminar, "American Literature and the Racial Afterlife:" "the paradox of American slavery and freedom--entangled in racial violence that enforces black subjugation, racial terror, and white supremacy--has resulted in both physical and psychological trauma that continue

to be a dominant feature of American society.” The English Department has very consciously committed to the shared task of studying difference as an ongoing process subject to reinvention and revision. This interest is longstanding, but over the last several years, the faculty have worked as a body not to take attention to diversity for granted. The faculty are conscious of the ease with which “diversity” can and does get reduced to a byword and catchphrase. It is the domain of English professors to study words closely, so it is not surprising that the faculty, as a body, continues to push against easy coinages and definitions, and to approach the teaching of difference using multiple approaches. “How does one write ‘the world,’ including all people, without participating in cultural appropriation?” poet Gillian Conoley asks in her Fall 2021 creative writing workshop for graduate students. This is not a simple task, she counsels. Her 530 workshop has come up “with no easy answers” or “definitive solutions,” but the refusal to make quick work of a complex issue has resulted in “rich and probing” conversations. Megan McIntyre, who served as the English Department’s Writing Program Director, framed a similarly difficult question with respect to her own teaching. “How do we create more equitable, thoughtful, and compassionate writing pedagogies, courses, and programs?” For Professor McIntyre, exploring diversity in her 587 Seminar in Rhetorical Theory course means engaging a wide range of approaches so as to avoid oversimplifying: critical pedagogy, critical race studies and composition, multiliteracies, language diversity in the writing classroom, students’ rights to their own language, womanist and intersectional feminist approaches to teaching, disability studies, and culturally sustaining pedagogies. In “Dangerous Women,” her spring 2020 graduate seminar, Professor Goldman adopted a vertical rather than horizontal approach to difference, premising the investigation of gender as an axis of difference on the notion that “literary representations of feminine authority have historically been more limited and impervious to revision than projections of masculine power.” “What makes a woman “dangerous” in fiction?” this course asked, following up this question with other queries: What should we make of the relentless sexualization of women in literature (by female readers and writers as well as men)? To what extent does talk of sex script women’s erotic lives, and to what extent does this language mask the desire for power?

Professor Wo’s Spring 2020 581 seminar on “Ecocriticism with Class Consciousness” asked MA candidates to focus upon both class and race differences through posthuman, postcolonial, and new materialist ecocritical lenses.

For Brantley Bryant, the Department’s resident medievalist, recent graduate-level teaching means emphasizing “the historical study of gender, sexuality, class, interactions of humans and environment, race, disability/ability, ideologies of language use, and connections of early literatures and histories to later colonial and imperial projects.” His last graduate seminar, *Knights and Courts in Medieval Literature*,

provided students critical lenses with which to explore “gender, sexuality, and queerness” in the “class-based and protonationalistic” texts of medieval chivalry. In Bryant’s classroom, students appraised a canonical 12th-century French text, *Silence*, with special attention to questions related to trans identity--issues that contemporary scholarship has raised and with which students were asked to contend in this text. Bryant’s work with medieval texts clarifies a fact that, while obvious, is perhaps not always fully recognized: difference along multiple axes is not something born in the 20th century and one that continues into our own day, but something that has always been present and which we need to train our eyes and ears to recognize.

The graduate courses sampled above are just that, but across period and genre they suggest a consistent valuation of difference as a teaching tool. In their variety, they also point toward the fact that first and foremost, the Department’s approaches to diversity are themselves diverse. Flexibility, nuance, and a range of topical and methodological approaches, the Department argues, are crucial for advanced students—advanced past the BA. The plurality of approaches is also, the Department argues, a healthy index of the “ongoingness” of the faculty’s commitment to exploring diversity across a wide range of forms.

C. 3 Ongoing Reinventions of the Teaching of Difference

That said, the faculty of the English Department recognize the necessity not only for continued revision of their pedagogy with respect to notions of diversity, but sustained self-critique. Possessing a theoretical apparatus that is flexible and responsive is paramount, but the practicalities of classroom situations--managing the distinct and quite different chemistries that develop in each classroom, guiding the relationships that form between students in workshop as well as in seminars devoted to criticism and pedagogy, calling the self to account as a professional who is also and always “still learning”--these variables, constantly shifting, require constant attention. The English Department faculty are fortunate in having in-house expertise with this work. Their colleagues trained in pedagogy (English Education comprising one of the three strands of study offered in English) constitute an important resource in this regard for the Department as a whole.

Theresa Burruel Stone’s research in English Education lies squarely in this camp. Her work assesses how Bridge Program youth contend with kinds of socialization at college that inevitably reinforce as much as they undermine the larger structural inequities the country contends with. Stone’s own reappraisal as a teacher begins with this work, which she is currently revising with the aim of submitting it in the form of a book proposal. Reflecting both upon her “commitments and the ‘why’” of her scholarship,

Stone has chosen to rewrite her proposal so that it is accessible “to a broader audience”--namely, college-age students of ethnic studies. Doing so, she argues, may help provide this audience--themselves the subject of her study--with tools to help them “think through the ideas” her research develops.

Brantley Bryant notes that part of his “redesign” of the English 500 methodology course, a general introduction to graduate students in English, meant revisiting his list of “critical and theoretical works, making sure to emphasize the work of BIPOC and LGBTQ critics, theorists, and writers.” In his graduate seminar courses, he is focusing upon finding “ways to explore the connections of English texts with a wider world.” Conscious of his own “Anglocentric graduate training,” he is in the process of adopting a “Global Middle Ages” approach.

Gillian Conoley, Sonoma State’s resident poet, notes that in her workshops she finds herself thinking about the kinds of inequities Stone’s work, among others, articulates. “While I have always included a wide array of poets from underrepresented groups in my workshops and poetics classes, I have noticed that in my teaching, I am becoming more direct and candid in encouraging my students to discuss in depth the fraught, complicated relations between the privileged and the less represented, and how we may all, as writers, approach new ways of inclusion.”

Fiction writer (and current Department Chair) Stefan Kiesbye acknowledges the ways in which “Writing stories, poems, and essays... is a liberating experience, a way of writing yourself into the world and finding ways to communicate.” He continues, “But of course, it’s never as easy as that.” Kiesbye recollects a pivot point years earlier, when a Black student expressed frustration at a request by white students in a workshop to have “the nuances of her characters’ reactions explained within the story. Why should she have to do such a thing when white students” could take for granted that “everything they wrote would be understood without fail,” she asked. The exchange that followed revealed for Kiesbye, “how difficult it was to write and been seen in a culture dominated by white discourse, white tastes, white politics.” Kiesbye finds himself continuing to respond to this moment--a teaching moment not only for the classroom but for his own evolving pedagogy. Each year he revises the work he offers students as writing models, working toward literature that “offer glimpses of life overlooked by the dominant discourse.”

The Department offers sample narratives here in order to get at the subtlety and variety of critique. It notes that such self-criticism must be ongoing even as it is acknowledged to be a work in progress. It is almost impossible to quantify this kind of work, which begins with minute-to-minute responses in the classroom and culminates with time

spent after class in reflective awareness. Nonetheless, this hard to quantify but sustained form of assessment remains paramount.

C.4 Approaches to the Commitment to Serve a Diverse Group of Students

The English Department has been actively engaged in remaining attentive to difference in the classroom. Here as elsewhere, flexibility in adopting and adapting methodological approaches remains key for the faculty. Acknowledging “achievement gaps for students of diverse backgrounds,” Professor Wo has revised her approach to teaching theory in English 500. She begins by introducing students to “intersectional feminism,” which then serves as a “gateway to other advanced theoretical inquiries” and as a means to “bridge” students who possess varying degrees of analytic fluency.

Stefan Kiesbye argues that part of what is necessary is to create “an environment of mutual respect,” one in which students can be “unafraid to learn and enjoy discovering cultures they may not be a part of.” This is no easy task, he acknowledges. And yet establishing a classroom of mutual respect enables all students to voice their experience. Gillian Conoley noted that since she has herself become more open to candid discussion, her students have, too. Recently, a Mexican American student wrote via email to indicate how important these frank discussions in workshop were to him. “He encouraged me to keep asking the hard questions,” those questions that are “too often glossed over, or perhaps too quickly addressed.” Linger on just these concerns, Conoley noticed, “how hungry my students were for such lengthy, close engagement, as was I.”

Negotiating difference, honoring difference, and then asking students to honor each other in the classroom is not always a given. In fact, as necessary and enriching it is, it is hard to sustain amid a larger world that remains increasingly divided. The English Department acknowledges that this work requires a level of humility as well as self-awareness on the part of its faculty, as well as a concerted and unremitting effort to find the best methods of engaging students as whole people, and in creating classroom atmospheres that encourage curiosity, open discussion, and mutual tolerance.

D. Assessment of Learning Outcomes: ENGL 500 - Research and Critical Writing

As part of this cycle’s program review efforts, the program chose to assess English 500 for its alignment with the program’s learning objectives (presented in [B1](#)). ENGL500 is a required core course for M.A. candidates in English, typically taken during the first semester of the MA program. The course explores “advanced use of reference materials and library resources, and the techniques of critical and scholarly writing” (SSU course

catalog). A final assignment from English 500 was collected and analyzed according to a 1 to 10 scale to rate the degree to which the student paper reflects the program learning objectives. The assessment reviewed student papers collected from three semesters: Fall 2016, Fall 2019, Fall 2020.

The resulting assessment shows that the assignments indicate a mostly satisfying rate of alignment with most of the English MA program's learning objectives, with objectives 3 and 4 showing clear unevenness among the papers reviewed. Objective 3 asks that students be able to "Articulate a critical understanding of language and its relationship to power"; objective 4 requests that "In reading, writing, and/or analysis of texts, demonstrate recognition of centuries of injustice based on intersecting categories of race or ethnicity, gender identity, sexual orientation, age, dis/ability, home language, religious beliefs, and/or immigration status."

In a reflective discussion afterwards with students, we found that Engl 500's curricular contents are more concerned with power systems/hierarchies as they are represented in literary texts; historical social injustices and inequalities of power are focal points in many/most/if not all of our discussions. The student representatives, particularly in the creative writing track, interpreted the English Department's MA learning objectives concerning the "power of language" to ask the following questions:

- a. How do students use language to create changes in their lives?
- b. How does literacy empower the individual?
- c. How do students find their individual voices? Particularly concerning the following scenarios:
 - i. Discussions about identity and empowerment in the classroom which help individuals discover themselves.
 - ii. When students feel safe to express themselves, it creates a space for authenticity to blossom.
 - iii. Writing in the first person, journaling and actively pursuing / questioning / constructing identity is how I approach this endeavor.

In other words, our curricular design emphasizes our students gaining awareness of oppression enforced by dominant, hegemonic language tradition and culture, whereas our English MA students would like to acquire the ability to use language as a vehicle of empowerment and social change.

Due to the small size of our program, we cannot regard such limited quantitative data as statistically significant. For us, the value of the learning outcome assessment resides in the culture of dialogue and programmatic reflection that it generates among faculty and students, and between faculty members or faculty and administration.

Action: In response to the learning outcome assessment, we have mounted ENGL588 Politics of Language. We also plan to emphasize the use of language as empowerment, social engagement, and exploration of imaginative potentials in ENGL530 as well as other courses. Students in the non-creative writing tracks are encouraged to take ENGL530, so as to engage with the transformative potential of language both in and out of the university, harkening back to our program's foundational roots which were indebted to the ideal of exploration beyond the boundaries of academia even while housed within its walls.

D. 1 How Our Program Aligns with Our Learning Objectives

Beyond reporting our evolving culture of assessment, in this section, we would like to explain how our program as a whole aligns with our program learning objectives.

Many facets of the English MA program at SSU work together to actualize our program learning goals. These can be outlined in these aspects: 1) building a community of critical readers and writers; 2) diverse methods; 3) language and power; 4) intersectionality; 5) finding distinct voices and perspectives.

D1.a Building a Community of Critical Readers and Writers

One of our MA program's central goals is to promote the development of advanced critical thinking and analytical reading skills. We meet these goals by creating a community of critical readers and writers in and out of the classroom. Our courses are taught as small seminars with approximately ten to twenty participants, offering students the opportunity for ongoing interaction with each other and with faculty in a challenging yet supportive academic setting. Our student community is also strengthened by student-organized cohort study groups, and by one-on-one mentorship with faculty members, an enduring tradition within the liberal arts. Our small and tight-knit community allows students to think big and venture far.

D1.b Diverse Methods in English Studies

Another of our MA program's goals is to encourage the understanding and use of critical methods. Our curriculum includes opportunities to explore a wide range of methodologies, including textual analysis, critical theory, academic research, and/or qualitative as well as interpretive methods. The program also offers opportunities to practice and enact these paradigms.

The intersection of theory, method, and practice is central to our programmatic milestones and co-curricular activities – such as opportunities to teach Engl 100A/B, tutor and serve as Assistant Director in the Writing Center (with whom we have maintained a long-term and close relationship), serve as embedded tutors for English in partnership with the LARC (Learning Academic and Resource Center), organize study groups for the qualifying exam, plan for the Writers in Sonoma event, participate in the English Student's Association, internships with The Sitting Room, a non-profit feminist library run by scholars, and to serve as editors for nationally renowned poetry magazine, *Volt*.

D.1c Language and Power

Our English MA program cultivates a critical understanding of language and its relationship to power. We work with intentional course content that engages with the relationship between language and power, or hierarchies in the classroom, as well as in the civic space of larger communications. We provide the study of theory, the study of non-traditionally canonical works, global Englishes as well as student-ready (home-languages). Critical awareness of power-driven hierarchy, the rhetoric of membership and being an insider or an outsider, and understanding the real-world stakes of this is one element of this learning outcome. Through dialogue emerging from our ENGL500 assessment, we also look at the development of students' voices in and outside the classrooms for social justice interventions and writing for social change; this process should include multiple entry points and be informed by students' own life experiences and political impulses.

D.1d Intersectionality

In reading, writing, and/or analysis of texts, our program seeks to demonstrate a recognition of centuries of injustice based on intersecting categories of race or ethnicity, gender identity, sexual orientation, age, dis/ability, home language, religious beliefs, and/or immigration status. We do so through offering diverse class content, staging critical reading of canonical and non-canonical texts, engaging contemporary theorists, fostering non-hierarchical dynamics between students/teachers, cultivating appreciation of the aesthetics difference embedded in different cultures and backgrounds. Programmatically regarding student and faculty populations, we are

inclusive in terms of outreach, attempting to model intersectionality through recruiting, retaining, and treasuring diverse faculty and students.

D.1e Finding One's Distinct Voice and Perspective

We meet the goal of finding distinct voices and perspectives by valuing student-led discussions in the classroom setting, through activities essential to the MA experience (as described in the section “Diverse Methods in English Studies”), between teacher and students, with each other and with oneself. Coursework helps students build toward a cumulative project that is original, self-defined, and faculty-supported. Through workshops and seminars and through one-on-one mentoring, students are encouraged to develop their own distinctive voices and perspectives, writing with attention to the rhythms and nuances of language, whether as a scholar or a creative writer. This learning outcome is a cumulative effect of other learning outcomes.

E. Graduate Student Survey Results

In a [survey](#) conducted by the Graduate School Office at SSU in Fall 2021 regarding factors that play into MA students' decision on pursuing graduate studies at SSU, on a scale of 0 to 5, the English MA received 4.8 in “schedule flexibility” and 4.6 in both “quality of faculty” and “curriculum.” These high ratings validate the English MA program's empowering educational practices, echoed by our self perception: we are a group of highly motivated scholar-educators whose curriculum is not only excellent but flexible and open to our students' intellectual needs. Yet, what about material rewards, basic sustenance, and survival?

Chart 5: Graduate Student Survey Results

1 low importance to 5 high importance	Biology	Counseling	CRM	Dept hPsy	ED	EC EMS	English	History	Nursing	MPA	Spanish
# respondents (Total = 99)	11	19	10	1	21	2	5	4	11	13	2

[University reputation]	3	3.4	3.9	3	3.3	4	2.5	3.3	4.4	3	3
[Program reputation]	3.7	4.5	4.9	4	3.5	4	3.4	3	4.7	2.9	3
[Quality of Faculty]	4.9	4.5	4.8	3	4	3.5	4.6	4.3	4.3	4	3.5
[Tuition (cost of program)]	3.9	4.6	3.6	5	4.3	4.5	4	4.3	4.2	4.3	4
[Financial assistance availability]	3.7	4	3.5	1	2.9	5	3.6	3	2.2	3.3	3
[Scholarship availability]	4	3.8	3.5	1	3	5	3.8	3	2.4	2.9	3
[Assistance in obtaining loans]	2.5	3.2	2.3	1	2.6	4	3.8	2	1.8	2.9	2
[Availability of graduate assistantships]	4.1	2.9	3.1	1	2.7	4	3.8	2.8	1.5	2.4	3.5
[Alumni network]	3.4	1.9	3.7	1	2.4	4.5	2.8	2.5	1.9	2.6	2.5
[Curriculum]	3.5	4.1	4.6	5	4.1	5	4.6	4.5	4.3	3.5	4
[Training for work with diverse communities]	3.8	4.2	3.6	4	4.1	5	3.6	2.3	3.8	3.7	4.5
[Class schedule/flexibility]	3.5	3.4	3.7	3	4.6	5	4.8	3.7	4.7	4.2	4.5
[Accreditation status of program]	3.2	4.4	4.4	3	4.3	4.5	3.4	4	4.9	3.7	4.5
[Instructional use of technology]	3	2.7	3.9	1	3	5	3.6	2.3	3.5	2.9	3
[Length of program]	3.6	3.8	4	3	4.1	5	4.4	3.5	4.1	3.2	4
[Campus location]	4.2	4.2	3.5	4	4.1	5	4	4	3.4	4.3	5
[Research opportunities]	4.9	2.1	4.1	1	2.6	4.5	3.2	3	1.8	2.8	2.5

As the chart shows, institutionally, our students would like more psychological service, more financial aid and scholarship opportunities, and more training for work with diverse communities. In all of these aspects, the ratings are between 3.6 to 3.8.

“Alumni network” is rated 2.8 and “university reputation” is rated 2.5. Not only did we find that 100% of our English MA students were working, but 4 out of 5 students were working over 36 hours per week. From my own informal conversations with students, many of them also work more than one job. Imagine the tenacity, drive, and passion for English that our students must have to keep up with their 500 pages a week reading loads, many doing this not for the aspiration of high paying jobs but because of conviction and self-actualization? Yet the fact that generations of English scholars are willing to learn and live under such difficult material conditions does not mean that this is either socially or ethically responsible – it is not a desirable situation, in short – it feels unjust.

I regard the lukewarm numbers in both areas to be related to the constraints placed on upward social mobility for working class white students and students of color. This is not a situation unique to SSU. The inverted salary structure experienced in the English students’ prospective job market, where English graduates hold more advanced degrees than workers from other educational backgrounds yet are paid at lower rates, can be seen in Chart 7 (below).

Amidst the qualitative feedback, one English MA student in the teaching assistant cohort, which usually represents our best and most committed students, reported in the above survey that, despite being provided a stipend for teaching one course plus given full tuition waivers, they still had to take on additional jobs just to keep afloat, writing: “Please start properly compensating your student employees for the intense amount of work we do, or at the very least, fully waive tuition fees AND tuition for those with GA’s. We shouldn’t need to work more than 3 jobs to simply get by.”

Such spirited outcries pierce through the silence of the night and never fail to make me weep. There lies a pool of tears very ancient but still always freshly nestled in the generations and generations of undercompensation that this society has awarded its English teachers. Such reality hurts, particularly because most of our students are first-generation, working-class students, even if they do not always so boldly announce this. The deflated pay that they have to endure casts a shadow on the promises of higher

education, intellectual pursuit, and women's rights that CSU as a system promised and it is one that we ought to collectively change.

E.1 Alumni Network

–Treading through the muddy puddles

In analyzing the Alumni network, my memory river flows to one beautiful afternoon in Fall 2007, with a bright smile on his face, my late modern Americanist colleague, Bob Coleman, hailed me into his office and enthusiastically introduced me to an English major, who is a returning student, a nonchalant intellect, a working single mother, with a dashing brilliant mind and a passion for literature and critical theory. She later became my teaching assistant, an MA student in our program, a lecturer faculty member with three-year entitlement, winner of SSU's Excellence in Teaching Award in 2018. She has served actively as a lecturer representative many times in the faculty governance senate, among her other excellent achievements. (I am more than proud of her and what she has made of herself with her education.) She represented one of the best teacher-scholars that our program was able to foster. Yet, during COVID-19 pandemic, she lost her entitlement and was rehired at a lower salary scale for a position of higher responsibility. When I asked her about English MA alumni, without blinking her eyes, she typed out 21 names. (Shall I compare thee to the summer days, days Judith gets the pay she deserves)

I look around me. I saw many SSU English MA graduates working as lecturers in SSU's composition program, in SSU's academic programs and student service sectors (in LARC, the Writing Center, the TRiO program), in high schools within SSU's service areas, in colleges in California and around the nation. (They are hired despite our alumni network, not because of it. As professors, we are almost afraid to let others know that so many of our graduates are working alongside us. You wonder why?) Dr. Megan McIntyre, who left SSU in 2021, once said when she first stepped into the role of the Director of the Writing Program: you have graduates who love you all so much that they are willing to withstand low pay, difficult working conditions to continue to stay around

you. What would we say to each other if we have an alumnae alumnus homecoming?
 “Did he smile his work to see? /Did he who made the Lamb make thee?”

E.2 Alumni Beyond the Field of Education and Library Service

Beyond the field of education, data from the U.S. Census Bureau shows that English graduates have found jobs in wide ranging occupations: management, art, design, entertainment, sports, media, office and administrative support, business and financial operations, and in many occupations yet to be invented. The breadth and fairly even distribution of the wide range of occupations that English students have participated in suggests that the skill sets that English as a discipline provide hold wide-ranging application and our graduates are multi-talented and capable of adjusting to changing work environments. Our alumni’s job distribution mirrors the data from the U.S. Census Bureau.

Chart 6: Employment distribution of workers with an English degree, by occupational group, 2019

Occupational group	Occupational group share
Educational instruction and library occupations	22%
Management occupations	16
Arts, design, entertainment, sports, and media occupations	9
Office and administrative support occupations	9
Business and financial operations occupations	8
Other	36
Note: The sum of percents by major may not total 100 due to rounding. Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey.	

*Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor, Occupational Outlook Handbook, Field of degree: English, at <https://www.bls.gov/ooh/field-of-degree/english/english-field-of-degree.htm> (visited March 16, 2023).

Chart 7: Wage and Educational Level. English degree, 2019

Data	English	All fields
Employment	1,717,220	56,820,460
Median wage	51,000	60,000
Percent employed part time	21	15
Percent employed in occupations requiring at least a bachelor's degree	61	60
Percent with an advanced degree	46	37
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey.		

F. Responses to the Last External Program Reviewer

Dr. Sheree Meyer's external reviewer report (3/31/15) makes several recommendations, for example the English MA programs in the "Recommendation #2" section. We would like to thank her for her observations and use this section to record our program's specific responses to her recommendations in this review cycle:

1. On the equivalence between the oral qualifying exam and the alternative way of serving as Teaching Assistant for the survey classes: The latter option has been eliminated due to lack of funding. However, if we have funding, the selection of the teaching assistant is based on their ability to pass the exam. The two options can be seen as our program's attempt to allow more advanced candidates in the English discipline to have an option that better satisfies and develops their capabilities.
2. On having "sufficient number of seminars particularly in Creative Writing and Comp/Rhet": the program has since ensured that the ENGL530 Multi-Genre Workshop be offered every other semester and ENGL587 and ENGL588 also routinely be offered for the Comp/Rhetoric track.

3. On options to present their cumulative work publicly: we have since included options for both public thesis reading as well as public creative writing reading to be hosted together. However not many students take the public thesis reading option. Thus, thesis defense remains the traditional time for graduates in non-creative writing tracks to shine.
4. Regarding “Consistency in the Research Methods course” across diverse instructors, we have balanced faculty expertise and interest with programmatic learning objectives in ENGL 500 - Research and Critical Writing.
5. On establishing teaching internships with local JCs: we have formed ties with the College of Marin. Our own teaching associate cohort for ENGL100A/B First Year Composition also satisfies this recommendation for practical training in teaching.

We appreciate Dr. Sheree Meyer’s recognition that:

“Like many programs in the CSU, [the English MA at SSU’s] strength is in its flexibility as a MA in English with multiple emphases. Such flexibility and diversity, along with the provision of teaching opportunities, does train students for future graduate studies and/or employment in community colleges as adjuncts in the university. Indeed, many of the current graduate students are expecting to teach at both Sonoma State and Santa Rosa College upon graduation, and many of the current lecturers are Sonoma State alumni.”

Dr. Meyer noted the challenges we would have, as a small program, to mount courses meeting the needs of all three tracks. Programmatically, the way the English MA has our MA tracks mirror those of the English BA tracks allows the program to survive with minimal graduate level courses. Additionally, the major core courses, the qualifying exam, and the thesis writing provide the structure that defines and elevates the program from the undergraduate experience to that of a graduate experience, while allowing flexibility for English MA students to take 400 level courses from either English, or other relevant disciplines, to build their own expertise and progress. This is a model that has allowed our small program to survive many challenging times. The English MA is a resilient program capable of minimizing its use of department or university resources. And when we have resources to develop further, we are also capable of soaring. We are an important site for the North Bay's language art teacher development; keeping the three tracks means that our local youth and returning students will have a place to grow into the kinds of teachers and professionals that they desire – teaching Composition, or Literature, or Creative Writing, or all of the above in an ambitious monstrosity – and still stay in the service area where they grew up, where they call home, and which they love.

F.1 Student Achievements

Our graduates have been active contributors to California's educational environment through serving as teachers at various levels. They are published creative writers. They are freelance editors or editors that work in various organizations. They are lawyers. They are active in the student service sectors. Indeed, they are in all walks of life and highly capable of changing career tracks.

Some of the graduates, given our emphasis in ecocriticism since the last review cycle onward, are also active in environmental advocacy organizations. [Attachment E includes a sample list of our alumni's achievements.](#)

Michelle Jones represents the kind of outstanding student that our program is able to foster and make stronger. She is visually impaired, which limits the schools she can attend because she relies on family who live in the area. As she herself said, she knows that everything she does reflects upon the English Department and the English MA program, so she works hard to represent us well.

Here is a list of achievements she made in the first year of being in the program:

- Mentor in the 2022-23 DREAM Mentor/Mentee Program (associated with AHEAD, Association on Higher Education and Disability)
- Created and Co-presented Conference panel presentation at NCWCA (Northern California Writing Centers Association) 2023
- Board member, Cultural Center Student Advisory Board (associated with SSU HUB)
- Organizing Committee member for SSU UAW Local 4123
- Elected Head Steward of UAW Local 4123 for Sonoma State University (Spring 2021)
- 2nd place in SSU Grad Slam (to represent SSU in state-wide 3-minute talk competition)
- Selected as candidate for Nichol's Scholarship (in the process of writing narratives to progress further in competition)
- Faces of SSU 2022-23
- Graduate Diversity Fellowship 2022
- 2022-23 Dale M. Schoettler Scholarship for Blind and Visually Impaired Students

Another example of our students' achievements can be seen in our Graduate students' active participation in NCWCA over the years (in partnership with SSU's Writing Center). Details of their participation this year can be found [here](#).

F.2 Five-Year Plan

It has not been psychologically easy to see the abuses in wage and job security that our graduates have experienced over the years. To wit, when the local school districts went on strike for K-12 teachers' fair wage, one of our graduates was the leader of the strike. Currently, one of our most outstanding current MA students is also part of the struggle for better pay for graduate teaching assistants across the nation. This is a testimonial to our graduates' abilities to put what they learned during their English MA experience to work, not only in the daily works of their professional lives, but also on the streets when they have to fight for their community's quality of education. It is, however, not our preference to see our teacher-students having to go on strikes just to receive a livable teaching-learning condition. Indeed, it would be hypocritical for our program to envision the next five years without accounting for the loss of a life-long career for many of our graduates working either as lecturers or student service professionals.

As such, our five-year plan is below:

1. Advocate better pay structure and career development trajectory for our students.

Given our unique identity as a liberal arts college in the public university system, we should set an example and advocate for fair compensation and a clear career trajectory. Rather than using economic recession, wildfires, COVID-19, and lower birth rates as an unprecedented crisis of higher education (such unprecedented crisis statements have been announced many times over the years), the English MA program is clear that our resilience – and working-class folks' place in Higher Education— relies on continual advocacy for our graduate assistants and lecturer faculty members. Their working conditions are the future of Higher Education.

2. Continue to make our MA degree more affordable, while balancing our students' pace of self-development with timely graduation.

3. Advocate for a limited residency Creative Writing program, which can help bring revenue, recruitment, opportunity, and prestige.

During his tenure as English Department Chair (2019-22), Stefan Kiesbye made this a priority planning item. The idea was widely supported in the department. While many creative-writing students thrive in our Master's Program, we recognize that the MFA is the preferred degree for those who wish to hold teaching positions in their future. We hope to revisit the feasibility of developing such a program.

4. Explore the possibility of connecting with Music, Art, Nursing, and Counseling to create an interdisciplinary medical humanities dimension or ecocritical dimension to our existing program. This can be best realized as a component in the proposed limited residency creative writing program.
5. Explore the possibility of a community writing center, an idea that our Alumna Erica Mullicane developed in her master thesis. A community writing center would allow SSU to serve our local communities' needs for writing tutoring. It would build on existing efforts led by Dr. Jen Johnson—of a SSU Writing Project, which would make SSU a satellite site of the Bay Area Writing Project. For our students, such a center would not only provide practical training and career development opportunities, but also promote a positive relationship between the community and the university.

F.3 Community Engagement and Outward-Facing Endeavors

For the purpose of this program review, we will cover community engagement and outward-facing endeavors in the examples of LARC and the Writing Center, our ties and collaboration with the Sitting Room, and our engagement with the College of Marin.

F.3a LARC and the Writing Center

The English MA has deep intellectual and institutional ties with the Sonoma State Writing Center dating back to 1997, when Dr. Scott Miller began the Writing Center and served for decades as Director. Since 2018, The Writing Center has been housed in The LARC (The Learning and Academic Resource Center), which offers a student-educator model of academic support services.

As of this program review, all current administrative members of the LARC, all past and present Writing Center Faculty Directors, and all or almost all Assistant Directors are alumna from the English MA program. Because of the depth of this history and connection, both the Writing Center and the English MA program are interested in further deepening that tie and formalizing the already existing partnership with the Writing Center, that works extensively with professionalization opportunities for English students – for example, graduate student mentorships and PhD placements, facilitating academic conference attendance and presentations for English MA students, professional development certifications, and working within the local community in various educational partnerships.

F.3b The Sitting Room

[The Sitting Room](#) is a non-profit women's library in Penngrove, CA which has partnered with SSU to provide internship opportunities for students. Inspired by the work of modernist writer Virginia Woolf, the founders and many past and current board members of the Sitting Room are directly affiliated with the English Department at SSU.

Student interns learn to work in a non-profit organization involving interactions with the informal membership of women and men who utilize this community library dedicated to celebrating the achievements of women, with its collection of over 6,000 books by and/or about women. Working at the Sitting Room overlaps with English MA students' interests and majors as well as with their plans for the future. There are opportunities to do research, to write, to plan literary events, to work either in teams or individually, and sometimes even just to read some of those women writers one might not have been exposed to in high school (or even, at times, college).

Duties and possible projects student interns may participate in at the Sitting Room:

- Help the Library serve its readers and writers, support the writing workshops, salons, events, exhibits, etc.
- Work with archival maintenance and improvements of the system.
- Give tours to the general public and to scholars.
- Encourage research by example and direction.

- Marketing the Sitting Room to the academic and the larger community through expanding its social media presence.

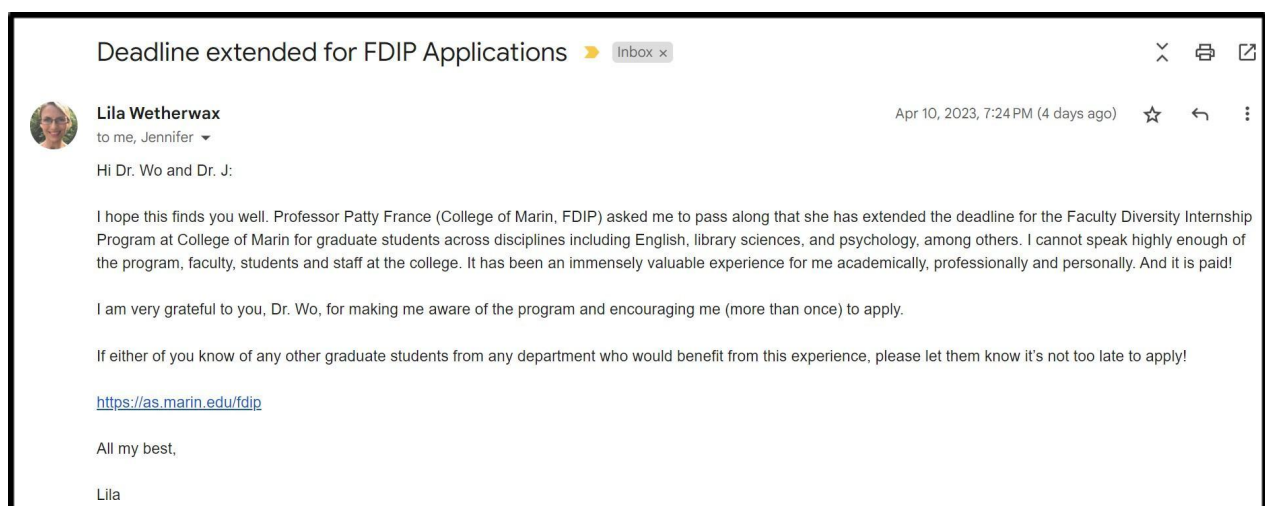
Orientation and training provided by the Sitting Room to student interns:

- Training by professional librarians for library maintenance, data entry, and principles of organization.
- On site information about the mission of the agency, its history, its present needs, and its future to provide context.
- Guidance on self-directed projects from site supervisors, other interns, and our long-term volunteers.

F.3c College of Marin

Starting in 2021, the English MA program has actively worked to send our students to the College of Marin's [Faculty Diversity Internship Program](#). Historically, the FDIP had not received enough applications from scholars of color. We deeply respect the College of Marin's commitment to mentoring this demographic. We are committed to recruiting more students of color and assisting them to apply to the FDIP.

Below is an email from Lila Wetherwax, the first SSU English MA who participated in the FDIP at College of Marin, expressing her deep sense of reward:



The English MA program celebrates these outward facing endeavors and hopes to continue to cultivate and develop these and similar connections.

G. Dissemination of this Program Review

The Program Review will be updated to reflect feedback from the external reviewer, Dr. Asa Mittman

The Review and the External Review shall be forwarded to

- The Arts and Humanities School Curriculum Committee
- Arts and Humanities Interim Dean Ed Beebout

After receiving and incorporating feedback from these two steps, the Program Review, External Review and Campus, the program review will be forwarded to the University Program Review Subcommittee (UPRS).

H. LIST OF ATTACHMENTS (as hyperlinks)

Attachment A: [SSU English MA Handbook](#)

Attachment B:  [ENGL500 Assessment Result Charts.xlsx](#)

Attachment C: [Recommendations from 2014-15 External Consultant's Report](#)

Attachment D: ENGL500 Syllabi

[Appendix D1 ENGL500 Syllabus 2016.pdf](#)

[Appendix D2 ENGL500 syllabus 2019.pdf](#)

[Appendix D3 ENGL500 Syllabus 2020.pdf](#)

Attachment E: [English MA student placements and achievements](#)

Sonoma State Masters in English Program External Reviewer Report

Asa Simon Mittman, PhD

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1. Introduction

This document serves as my External Program Review for the Masters in English Program (hereafter MEP) at Sonoma State University (SSU). Herein, I attempt to describe what I see as the main strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities for the program. In preparation for this report, I have read the *Graduate Program Review, Sonoma State University, Master of Arts in English* (Self-Study); interviewed Associate Vice President of Academic Affairs and Dean of Undergraduate and Graduate Studies Stacey Bosick, Interim Dean of the School of Arts and Humanities Edward Beebout, Department Chair Tim Wandling, English Department Tenure Track/Tenured and lecturer faculty, current MA students, and a recent program alumni; toured English Department facilities; and read published information about the MEP, the Department, and the University. Administrator, faculty, and student comments cited throughout are based on notes I have on file. The impressions that I received from all of these regarding present strengths and weaknesses were remarkably consistent, and the Department as a whole is self-evidently a model of collegiality and mutual support. I have organized this report into five main sections (plus Introduction and Conclusion) as defined by SSU's *External Reviewer Guidelines for Program Review*.

My top-level observations are as follows:

1. MEP faculty are excellent. They bring a wide range of theoretical and methodological approaches to their material, as well as sincere dedication to the principles of diversity, equity, and inclusion and genuine care for their students;
2. Curriculum is strong, and faculty are committed to examining some of the most important, current issues in the field and in the wider culture that surrounds us. Faculty bring these issues to courses throughout the MEP;

3. Faculty retirements and one faculty leaving for another position have significantly curtailed MEP course offerings, mentorships, and advising, particularly in American Literature and Creative Writing, which are areas of significant student interest, *and* have the potential to align closely with SSU campus priorities, including support of the campus's role as a Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI), offerings of new GE Area F Ethnic Studies courses, and support of underrepresented minority (URM) students;
4. Current faculty are strained to the breaking point with teaching, service, and unsupported administrative work, with unremunerated advising and mentoring of students, and even with simply meeting the course needs of MEP students from semester to semester. This situation is, in my estimation, unsustainable, and requires immediate administrative support.

In what follows, I provide evidence for these conclusions, and make recommendations for steps that the MEP could take to build on their strengths and address some of their weaknesses. The Department has a supportive Chair and a supportive Dean. Planned (but as yet unspecified and presumably as yet undetermined) campus restructuring is a source of great concern among the faculty, and rightly so. I would not be so Panglossian as to suggest something like: "This is a great opportunity for the department!" Rather, it necessitates that the Department engage meaningfully with the restructuring process and look for any possible alignments and complementary goals. The University has some strategic initiatives and goals that I believe align very well with the stated values and objectives of the Department. I discuss these in Section 5: *Sufficiency of resources*. I hope that this report is received in the spirit in which I write it — with a desire to help the Department and MEP sustain their program, advance their values, and achieve their goals, and so I hope that this report will be considered with care by the department and by SSU's Administration.

2. Curriculum coherency and currency

The English MA program has three distinct tracks, which are woven together to provide coherence. The tracks are:

- Literary Criticism
- Creative Writing
- English Education/Rhetoric

All English MA students take a shared set of Core Courses that help build comradery with each cohort. These are ENGL 500: Research and Critical Writing; ENGL 530: Graduate Workshop in Creative Writing and/or ENGL 587: Seminar: Rhetorical Theory; and at least two literary studies seminars. Following coursework, students produce a variety of culminating projects, such as "a critical thesis, a curricular development research report, a book-length manuscript, or a digital arts project" (Self-Study, p. 3. Hereafter, page numbers refer to the Self-Study).

The program is centered on “one-on-one mentoring and faculty-supported, student self-directed, and project-based explorations” (p. 3), with “a commitment to language as a space for identity-based inquiry and a praxis of empowerment” (p. 18). While graduate students focus on one of the three tracks, Professor and former Chair Stefan Kiesbye describes them as mutually enriching, as students from all three tracks work collectively toward the common goal of “living and working in the field of literature.”

The most important facet of the MA in English as regards *currency* is the department-wide dedication to thoughtful integration of principles of diversity and inclusion at all levels of curricular development and pedagogic strategies. These are deeply aligned with SSU’s campus-wide initiatives, including its status as a Hispanic Serving Institution. Further, actively working to make students feel supported, welcomed, and included in the life and curriculum of the department helps improve student success through increased retention and progress toward graduation. As the Self-Study notes:

The English Department has very consciously committed to the shared task of studying difference as an ongoing process subject to reinvention and revision. This interest is longstanding, but over the last several years, the faculty have worked as a body not to take attention to diversity for granted. The faculty are conscious of the ease with which “diversity” can and does get reduced to byword and catchphrase (p. 26).

Of course, many US universities have updated their mission statements to include advocacy Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI), but this is more often than not rhetorical positioning rather than sincere commitment backed up with thoughtful curricular and systemic change. It is therefore all the more noteworthy to see the English Department faculty are working to move beyond their own “Anglocentric graduate training” by “making sure to emphasize the work of BIPOC and LGBTQ critics, theorists, and writers,” by “becoming more direct and candid in encouraging ... students to discuss in depth the fraught, complicated relations between the privileged and the less represented,” and by focusing on literatures that “offer glimpses of life overlooked by the dominant discourse” (p. 30). Faculty comments throughout the report evince particular care and attentiveness to the fostering of a welcoming, inclusive academic and creative culture in the English Department, one that “encourage[s] curiosity, open discussion, and mutual tolerance” (p. 31).

The Department’s 8 tenure-track and tenured (TT/T) faculty cover very wide range of periods (Classical to postmodern), cultures (e.g. medieval English, 18th century British, Chicana/Latina, and Chinese cultures), and theoretical approaches (e.g. ecocriticism, ethnography, feminism, intersectional sexualities, monster studies, postcolonial literature, posthumanism, raciolinguistics,

and more). This breadth will be curtailed with the impending retirements of FERP faculty Prof. Anne Goldman (American Literature/Creative Writing, but also Chicana, African American, and Jewish literature), Scott Miller (Composition-Rhetoric, but also modern myth), and Prof. John Kunat (Renaissance literature, but also New Sexualities).

The Department's faculty have been substantially diminished through attrition, and this will continue in the coming semesters. Coverage lost due to faculty retirements is in essence random; this is *directly opposed* to thoughtful and programmatic departmental redesign. This is, of course, in no way the fault of the Department, which is clearly doing all it can under severe constraints. However, students are highly attuned to and frustrated by the shifts in coverage. As two students explained in interviews, the graduate students generally want to focus on American literature, but the majority of the remaining faculty specialize in British literature, though they acknowledge that many of these faculty introduce at least some literature from outside Britain in their courses. Indeed, some Americanist lines have been unfilled for fifteen years. There were once three, and now there is one TT/T Americanist, Prof. Kim D. Hester Williams. Several members of the department praised her teaching and scholarship, though the Chair noted that her joint appointment with American Multicultural Studies does mean that the lone remaining Americanist is not able to offer a full teaching load in English.

In order to deepen their praxis of inclusivity, “the program has recently expanded in areas of culture-sustaining pedagogy, the use of grading contracts, and anti-racist pedagogy” (p. 7). However, again, the loss of a member of the faculty hampers this effort. The Self-Study identifies Dr. Megan McIntyre, who left in Summer 2022, as a key force in “this focused curricular development” (p. 7). In sum, the MEP program curriculum's coherence and currency are both excellent, but also both imperiled by diminishing faculty ranks.

3. Relevance and clarity of learning outcomes and integration with curriculum

The Self-Study describes five “aspects” of the Department's alignment of curriculum and Program Learning Outcomes (PLOs, p. 21):

1. Demonstrate advanced critical and analytical reading skills.
2. Utilize sound methodologies (including textual analysis, application of critical theory, academic research, and/or qualitative methods) for investigating questions in English studies.
3. Articulate a critical understanding of language and its relationship to power.
4. In reading, writing, and/or analysis of texts, demonstrate recognition of centuries of injustice based on intersecting categories of race or ethnicity, gender identity, sexual orientation, age, dis/ability, home language, religious beliefs, and/or immigration status.
5. Write effectively, considering audience, context, and purpose, as well as the relevant protocols for compiling and disseminating one's scholarly or creative work.

6. Develop a distinctive voice and perspective, writing with attention to the rhythms and nuances of language, whether as a scholar or a creative writer.

In interviews with several current MA students and one recent MA graduate, students were unified in their praise for the department's cultural climate and strong sense of community, which is an element of the first PLO. They spoke of their "love for the program, faculty, and fellow students," and their appreciation of the sense of "community and camaraderie" in the program. They further applaud the department's strong support for students with disabilities, and one student with a disability celebrated the Department as a place where they felt "unconditionally accepted." Another stated that they "never felt so comforted by an academic environment," which is demanding but also fosters important skills. Unsurprisingly, they find that some faculty are more fully present and involved in the program than others, and are grateful to these professors, who have created an environment that one student described as "a treasure." Multiple individuals singled out Prof. Chingling Wo for her central role in fostering a sense of community among the graduate students.

Prof. Kiesbye described the Department as a "peaceful, tight-knit community" where dedicated faculty "tailor the curriculum to the changing needs of student populations." Even through the heart of the Covid pandemic, he said, "people rallied together to find ways to continue to create a sense of presence and collectivity." Dean Edward Beebout confirms the notable degree of collegiality in the department, "all the more remarkable in these strained times." Prof. Theresa Burruel-Stone, the most recent faculty hire, feels "really supported by the rest of the Department in a number of ways." While she arrived with "lots of experience teaching, ... there is helpful feedback as needed," including via peer classroom observations, and "lots of great guidance on which committees to join and when," as well as strong support for her scholarship.

Faculty currently cover a wide breadth of methods, as sought in the second PLO (see [Section 2: Curriculum coherency and currency](#) for details on various methodologies). This range is, as noted in Section 2, imperiled by the diminishment of the faculty. Each member of the faculty brings to the program an impressive methodological range, which is a great asset; however, this means that each retirement or resignation brings with it a substantive loss of methodological and cultural coverage.

The third PLO pertains to "language and power." The Self-Study states that MEP faculty:

work with intentional course content that engages with the relationship between language and power, or hierarchies in the classroom, as well as in the civic space of larger communications. We provide the study of theory, the study of non-traditionally canonical works, global Englishes as well as student-ready (home-languages).

Students teaching in the ENGL 100 program noted the excellence of the pedagogy course, ENGL 587: Seminar: Rhetorical Theory, in training them in a range of pedagogic theories. They did, though, voice a desire for more *practical* teaching advice as they have felt somewhat unprepared for and overwhelmed by the more quotidian challenges of teaching. One practical suggestion offered was to invite students currently teaching in the program to speak with the future Teaching Associates about their experiences.

I applaud the department's inclusion of their fourth PLO, which requires students to consider the historical legacy of injustices, which are in line with SSU's first of four Core Values, "Diversity and social justice." (*Strategic Plan 2025: Building Our Future @ SSU*, 1 <https://strategicplan.sonoma.edu/>). It is rare to see these values, often professed by academics, reflected at the departmental level in formal documents, policies, and procedures. The underlying values are further explored in *Section C2. Exploring Diversity in Faculty Courses* (p. 26-28). Students find faculty sincere in their efforts to address a wide range of complex and overlapping intersectional identities in their courses. They note, though, that "students arrive in the program with all sorts of issues," by which they mean biases or bigotries, that they express in classroom discussions. This is inevitable, and all indications are that the Department takes it seriously. Faculty cannot (and perhaps should not) prevent students from expressing views that some might find offensive, but should be sure to clearly and directly address views that contradict the Department's stated values.

Prof. Anne Goldman believes that the faculty's focus on race may at times come at the expense of consideration of other facets of non-normative identities, though she suggests that the department is doing the necessary work of "decentering the 'North Star' of the historically entitled and protected group." I have long considered race to be the preeminent issue of our times — a claim that I have been making in just these words for decades, and which seems as true to me in 2023 as it did in 1989 — and my study of the program does not evince any overemphasis of this signal feature of US culture, politics, and literary arts. The Department's focus on intersectionality further emphasizes the integration of the study of race with other elements of identity. Still, one student did note that, as an "older student," they did not "feel fully seen by other students or faculty." While this was only one comment, and from a student who otherwise praised the MEP, this might be an identity position deserving of more consideration.

Regarding the fifth and final PLO, which encourages students to develop "distinct voices and perspectives," current students desire additional formal feedback from faculty on their writing. They would appreciate further constructive criticism, perhaps through more formal drafting processes built into the structure of their courses. They find the faculty highly supportive and available outside of class, but would like to see more mentorship in the development of their writers' voices *within* classes, as well. Further, students agree that the MEP does an excellent job

of welcoming incoming students into the program and fostering a sense of inclusion, but they wish for additional guidance for students finishing the program, in particular those working on their theses. This can often be an isolating experience, and while students say that faculty are responsive to queries, they would like to see more structure and proactive contact. It might be worth some care and deliberation by the faculty to see if they can generate new structures and systems to make this stage less lonesome. Indeed, one student seemed especially unsure and anxious, and stated that they felt “in over [their] head” in their thesis project.

However, the main complaint from current students is that they feel the program does not offer enough graduate seminars. This restricts student choice, in that they generally take whatever seminars are offered, rather than selecting those of greatest interest. Chair Wandling opined that he has had to spend a great many hours helping students find paths to graduation. The lack of seminars can also extend time to graduation. Indeed, all three students of a current cohort plan to stay in the program for three years rather than two, as is theoretically the design of the program, and as is the standard across US institutions of higher education. Faculty noted in interviews that they want the students to stay as long as they wish in order to explore, to have time for personal growth and intellectual expansion. In principle, I agree with this approach. However, it is worth bearing in mind that this is not a fully-funded graduate program. Students are in large measure paying their way through it, and so additional semesters come at additional cost to the students. If students are making the choice to stay for a third year out of a genuine desire to learn more and deepen the content of their research and writing, then this is a positive arrangement, but if they are staying around for an additional year due to insufficient course offerings, then it is a problem to be addressed. This situation may also hinder efforts to recruit Pell Grant eligible students, first generation college students, and members of historically marginalized groups. The only reliable route to increasing course offerings is, of course, to hire additional TT/T faculty. This would help the program meet several of its PLOs. The department’s Five Year Plan does include as a goal, “Continue to make our MA degree more affordable, while balancing our students’ pace of self-development with timely graduation” (43). I’d suggest that greater availability of timely graduation is an issue of equity, and therefore to be sought.

I have a few additional notes regarding the relevance and clarity of learning outcomes and integration with curriculum that do not pertain to any particular PLO but rather, seem to bear on the relevance of elements of the curriculum to the PLOs, as a whole. First, several students questioned the content of the qualifying exam generally taken in the first year of the program. They referred to it as “problematic” and noted that the authors featured therein lack the diversity that the Department otherwise celebrates. Indeed, I was surprised to hear “the literary canon” invoked by administration, faculty, and students throughout the day of my site visit. I realize that I come to this task as something of an outsider not only to SSU but also to the discipline of English, as I am an art historian by training and profession. In art history, the notion of “the canon” has been widely critiqued for decades and is generally covered as a historiographical

artifact rather than a valid category deserving perpetuation. I had not heard this notion invoked as if it referred to some generally-agreed-upon set of great texts for many years. Of course, the scholars who inspired the deconstructive work of examining the canon in art history were in Linguistics and other textual fields. I was therefore surprised to hear “the canon” and “canonical works” used without apparent irony in the MEP.

At a minimum, students would appreciate it if faculty would avoid teaching in seminars texts that they have all studied for qualifying exams. Indeed, some noted that there were texts that they read three or four times while studying for the exam and taking courses. They would really like to see the list for the exams heavily edited to include more world literature in English rather than having a tight focus on British and US literature. In essence, what they are asking for is for the qualifying exam to more closely reflect the values of the program. If the faculty are to escape their “Anglocentric graduate training,” if they are “to emphasize the work of BIPOC and LGBTQ critics, theorists, and writers,” and if they wish to celebrate texts that “offer glimpses of life overlooked by the dominant discourse” (p. 30), then it seems that the reading list for the qualifying exam is ripe for reexamination. This is somewhat surprising, given that the Self-Study lists “Reforming the qualifying exam” as one of the recent responses to 2021 WASC recommendations (p. 20).

Second, students expressed a desire for a pedagogy of writing that also aligns more closely with the Department’s stated values. Faculty advance antiracist, decolonial projects in many ways, but students find that that teaching of writing still largely advances the grammatical and stylistic conventions of so-called Standard English. One student articulated the tension they felt regarding this as a choice between “viability in the capitalist market” and “teaching what is *just* and *right*.” Ideally, a writing program would teach both, preparing students to meet the expectations of hiring committees while also fostering subversion of these very expectations so that students can plot their own course through systems of language and literature, en route to “finding distinct voices and perspectives,” and so that when these students are, themselves, in positions of authority, they will be positioned to overturn these conventions that are steeped in a historical legacy of racism and classism.

Two final thoughts regarding the integration of learning outcomes with curriculum:

1. In section D, under *Building a Community of Critical Readers and Writers*, the Self-Study states that “courses are taught as small seminars with approximately ten to twenty participants.” Arguably, a twenty-student seminar is a fairly *large* seminar (p. 33), especially at the graduate level.
2. The Self-Study includes assessment materials for ENGL 500: Research and Critical Writing. These materials are difficult to interpret. If they are clarified in a final draft of the Self-Study, I will attempt again to interpret them (see *Notes for Suggested Revisions* at the start of this document).

4. Meaningfulness and effectiveness of learning outcomes assessment and use of assessment for program improvement

In 2021, in a review of undergraduate and graduate programs in English, WASC recommended a university-wide review of the graduate programs, focusing on assessment; incorporation of insights from the program review with SSU learning objectives; and use of data tools to improve the program. The Self-Study indicates that the department has taken this on with great seriousness, implementing “retreats, focus groups, and curriculum assessments ... [to] help our program nurture a culture of programmatic and curricular reflections” (p. 20).

Some faculty and administration find SSU’s culture of assessment disappointing. The faculty genuinely desire to achieve their PLOs, and wish, as Prof. Goldman puts it, for students “to exit each class enriched and inspired, as better citizens, with well-developed emotional and intellectual resources.” However, many find (as seems to be ubiquitous across US institutions of higher education) that the assessment processes at SSU are burdensome, bureaucratic hurdles that do little to help them achieve these goals.

The MEP conducted an assessment of ENGL 500: Research and Critical Writing, a core MA course, using MEP learning objectives, which resulted in the following changes (p. 20):

- Reforming the qualifying exam
- Consolidation of culminating experience
- Setting up milestones for a clear path of progression

The Self-Study states that the MEO “saw the two-year graduation rate stabilize to around 50%” between 2014 and 2020 (p. 22). I am not sure that this accurately describes the data provided for two-year graduation rates for these years. The data quite varied from 2012 to 2019, and is not provided for 2020 (p. 24). Still, the Self-Study makes clear that the English faculty do not “chase after the numbers but to maintain a culture of support and accommodation for students’ diverse learning and life conditions” (p. 22). This is laudable from a pedagogical perspective, and also from an ethical and humane one, though it is surely out of step with University directives and the 2021 WASC recommendations. Total graduation rates are provided in Chart 4 (p. 24, the first of two different charts labeled “Chart 4”).

The chart of graduation rates surprisingly does not provide totals that would result from adding the “2 Years” and “More than 2 years” graduation rates, but they would vary considerably, from a high of 100% for the 2016 cohort to a low of 36.4% for the 2013 cohort. I have updated this chart as follows:

Percent of starting cohort who graduated in	F 2012	F 2013	F 2014	F 2015	F 2016	F 2017	F 2018	F 2019
2 Years	22.2%	9.1%	45.5%	57.1%	88.9%	50.0%	53.3%	52.9%
More than 2 years	33.3%	27.3%	27.3%	28.6%	11.1%	25.0%	26.7%	5.9%
Total [added by ASM]	55.5%	36.4%	72.8	85.7%	100%	75%	80%	58.8%

The main improvement in 2-year graduation rates seems to be between 2012 and 2014, with an anomalous peak in 2016.

These numbers would be more meaningful if considered in light of the cohort sizes for these years. Under *Student Cohort Size* (p. 12), the Self-Study notes large fluctuations from year to year, but only provides data for 2018-2019 (5 students), 2019-2020 (21 students), and 2020-2021 (8 students). This means that the 80% total graduation rate for the 2018 cohort represents 80% of 8, which is not a whole number and therefore does not seem possible. The same is true of the “2 Years” and “More than 2 years” numbers. I am similarly unable to square the graduation percentages with the 21 students in the 2019 cohort. This may be the result of my misunderstanding of the data as given or of my poor arithmetic skills. However, without this contextualization of the percentages, it is difficult to interpret them. It is possible that the highest graduation rates represent the smallest cohorts, but then, it is also possible that they reflect excellent success with the largest cohorts. In any case, the department is right to be concerned that their improvements from 2012 and 2013 are jeopardized by the significant diminishment of the English faculty (p. 24).

The most compelling result from the assessment of ENGL 500 is the revelation of a mismatch between the faculty and student understandings of two of the six PLOs (p. 31):

Objective 3: “Articulate a critical understanding of language and its relationship to power”

Objective 4: “In reading, writing, and/or analysis of texts, demonstrate recognition of centuries of injustice based on intersecting categories of race or ethnicity, gender identity, sexual orientation, age, dis/ability, home language, religious beliefs, and/or immigration status.”

As the Self-Study notes:

curricular design emphasizes our students gaining awareness of oppression enforced by dominant, hegemonic language tradition and culture, whereas our English MA students would like to acquire the ability to use language as a vehicle of empowerment and social change (p. 32).

While the pool of surveyed students was small and the results in essence anecdotal, this distinction between faculty and student perspectives may reflect larger trends in orientations to problems of power inequality. While faculty are interested in exploring the historical roots of power imbalances, students are seeking to be agents of change. Both are worthwhile. Indeed, it is unlikely that the latter can be accomplished without the former. The English Department has responded to this student desire with ENGL 588: Seminar: Study of Language. Hopefully, future rounds of review will indicate that MEP students and faculty are more closely aligned in their understandings of these important PLOs

5. Sufficiency of resources and how they affect the quality of the learning experience; consider, for example, faculty, facilities, support, information resources, and research resources.

The Department is in the midst of a very rapid decline in faculty. It had 13 TT/T faculty in 2020, and will be reduced to 6 TT/T faculty by 2024. More than half of faculty will have been lost to retirements and leaving for other jobs in just four years, unless the SSU Administration approves new hires to ameliorate this loss.

While everyone I spoke with was of one mind regarding the dire problem of insufficient faculty, Prof. Goldman put these problems in the most stark of terms. When asked, “Do you feel that the department has sufficient resources to thrive and support the graduate program,” her response was “a resounding *no*.” I noted that multiple faculty had described the Department as “a leaky boat,” and she responded that “the boat is not leaky. It has sunk.” While Prof. Goldman is nearing retirement, she worries that the mid-level faculty are “being drowned.” Decisions are largely “triage to get students through,” and without hires, the Department — not merely the MEP — “cannot continue.” Dean Beebout affirms the seriousness of the situation. He notes that the “inadequate” number of TT/T faculty cannot merely be replaced with part-time lecturers because, while they can and do teach excellent courses, they are not expected to provide

advising, develop and guide curriculum, and otherwise participate in crucial departmental activities. Despite these great adversities, Chair Wandling and most members of the faculty maintain that the MEP is nonetheless managing to do a good job serving their students. The question is: *for how long?*

It is clear, based on the Self-Study and interviews with Department faculty and Chair, Dean of Arts and Humanities School, and graduate students past and present that new hires are necessary. The Self-Study states that the department is seeking two hires, one in Creative Writing and one in Contemporary American Literature. I concur that these are necessary in order for the Department to stay competitive. Indeed, they are necessary if the Department is to remain capable of supporting its students — graduate and undergraduate. The Department and Chair believe that the Dean is supportive, but has thus far lacked support from upper administration to secure the needed funding for this program. Indeed, one individual stated, in reference to the administration, that “the intellectual life of the university is harmed by their lack of support for student and faculty research.”

There is at present a single TT/T faculty in Creative Writing, though this concentration accounts for half the students in the Department. Further, the single TT/T faculty, Prof. Stefan Kiesbye, bears some administrative responsibilities and so does not teach a full load. Department faculty and Chair Wandling praise the lecturer faculty in the program, but are in general agreement that lecturers cannot fully ameliorate the problems of the lack of TT/T faculty

Associate Vice President of Academic Affairs and Dean of Undergraduate and Graduate Studies Stacey Bosick and Dean Beebout were candid about the prospects of hiring new faculty to “replace” faculty who have retired from or left SSU. According to AVP Bosick, SSU is going to undergo serious restructuring in the coming semesters. She encourages English Department faculty to participate actively in fora and to provide feedback to the Provost regarding potential systems for restructuring.

Neither Dean Beebout nor AVP Bosick thinks it likely that new TT faculty will be approved simply to fill the role of previous members of the faculty. Rather, both encourage the Department to align any hire requests with SSU’s strategic priorities. I realize that faculty often bristle at having to align their programmatic needs with shifting mandates from upper administration and from the Chancellor’s Office, but in this case, I believe that certain strategic priorities and needs of SSU correspond very closely with the values of the Department. I hope that they will see the following suggestions not as craven capitulation but rather as a useful strategy to achieve what genuinely are shared goals — at least rhetorically. As an HSI, SSU has a particular obligation to support its Latinx and Chicanx students. AVP Bosick states that this population of students “needs to be served.” Similarly, the campus must meet the enrollment needs of the new statewide GE Area F requirement in Ethnic Studies, which could have natural links with HSI status, as

courses in Ethnic Studies are required to be within “African American, Asian American, Latina/o American or Native American Studies” (<https://calstate.policystat.com/policy/8919100/latest/>). Both service to the campus’s HSI status and to the Ethnic Studies requirements could be natural manifestations of the Department’s “Ongoing Reinventions of the Teaching of Difference.” As the Self-Study argues, “the faculty of the English Department recognize the necessity not only for continued revision of their pedagogy with respect to notions of diversity, but sustained self-critique,” and in so doing, call for “a theoretical apparatus that is flexible and responsive” (p. 28). In this section, the Self-Study provides a genuinely inspiring list of MEP faculty that are taking up this work with seriousness of purpose. The following section of the Self-Study describes the MEP’s “Commitment to Serve a Diverse Group of Students,” which is, again, fully in accord with SSU’s needs. In this section, MEP faculty describe their “concerted and unrelenting effort to find the best methods of engaging students as whole people, and in creating classroom atmospheres that encourage curiosity, open discussion, and mutual tolerance” (p. 31).

AVP Bosick asks that the Department be very specific about their faculty needs, and that they tie these needs to the sorts of initiatives I have noted here. She asks that hire requests directly address how such hires would help SSU meet the goals of the CSU system-wide Graduation Initiative 2025 (GI2025), and how they would help achieve related student success goals. There is a happy confluence of the MEP’s trenchant rhetoric and the explicit mandates of GI2025, which seeks to better meet the needs of historically underserved student populations, to “promote equitable learning” with an awareness that “What happens in the classroom plays a significant role in a student’s sense of belonging, their gain or loss of academic confidence and ultimately if they earn a degree”

(<https://www.calstate.edu/csu-system/why-the-csu-matters/graduation-initiative-2025/closing-the-equity-gap/Pages/promote-equitable-learning-and-reduce-dfw-rates.aspx>).

Similarly, the Self-Study argues:

Negotiating difference, honoring difference, and then asking students to honor each other in the classroom is not always a given. In fact, as necessary and enriching it is, it is hard to sustain amid a larger world that remains increasingly divided. The English Department acknowledges that this work requires a level of humility as well as self-awareness on the part of its faculty, as well as a concerted and unrelenting effort to find the best methods of engaging students as whole people, and in creating classroom atmospheres that encourage curiosity, open discussion, and mutual tolerance.

And, in concord with this, GI2025 calls on programs to adopt “[g]rowing cultures of care” for “students of color, Pell grant recipients and first-generation students”

(<https://www.calstate.edu/csu-system/why-the-csu-matters/graduation-initiative-2025/closing-the-equity-gap/Pages/reengage-and-reenroll-underserved-students.aspx>). These are not synonymous

statements, but clearly speak to a common goal that I would suggest emphasizing in requests for new faculty hires.

Similarly, both the Department and AVP Bosick wish to see the MA program grow. AVP Bosick asks the Department to ask themselves, “What are their hopes and dreams? Where are they headed and how can [she] and the dean support them? What do they need beyond more faculty? What kinds of funding, pairings, and partnerships with other programs?” In a sense, the current MEP faculty, who primarily focus on British Literature, are not in alignment with the program’s well-articulated antiracist, decolonial, inclusive values. Department Chair Wandking noted that there are, for example, clear opportunities to ally with American Multicultural Studies, Chicano and Latino Studies, Global Studies, and Native American Studies in pursuit of new faculty who could teach within the MEP while also helping SSU meet its Area F staffing requirements.

As I understand it, the current workload structure does not compensate faculty for the work of overseeing students in ENGL 595: Special Studies or ENGL 599: Thesis and Accompanying Directed Reading, which do not count toward WTU. This is far from ideal. These activities, while quite different from a lecture course or seminar, are nonetheless valuable and time-consuming pedagogic practices. Faculty should be credited or otherwise remunerated for this work, which is the backbone of the MA program, currently performed without compensation. Even a single course release for the mentorship of many students over the course of a few years would be an improvement over the current system. He rightly describes the program as “a labor of love” that is “doing an excellent job of educating students,” but this work nonetheless remains *work* and should be remunerated like any other work performed in pursuance of job duties.

In a separate context, Dean Beebout described ENGL 494: Advanced Survey, a course that functions to give MEP students course credit for the study groups for their qualifying exams. Dean Beebout suggested that an equivalent course be created for students to work collectively while writing their theses. This could provide a greater sense of community while also assisting students with financial aid and other systems that set minimum enrollments. A third benefit could be the awarding of WTU to faculty, perhaps in rotation, for oversight of this group. There may well be institutional barriers that I am not aware of, but this might be worth investigating.

The Self-Study provides responses to the previous external program review (2015). Of note is the increase in sections of ENGL 530: Graduate Workshop in Creative Writing to every other semester, as well as more frequent offering of sections of ENGL 587: Seminar: Rhetorical Theory and ENGL 588: Seminar: Study of Language (p. 40).

One more area in which the MEP could use additional support is in the advertisement of the program and its accomplished faculty. Both faculty and students observed that there is little

celebration of the Department's accomplishments outside of the School of Arts and Humanities. Doing so would both improve morale within the MEP and potentially attract additional students.

6. Understanding of students' needs, challenges, and characteristics and ability to effectively serve the program's students.

The introduction to Section C: *Highlights of Faculty* establishes a fundamental commitment to diversity as foundational to all that the department does "in and out of the classroom" (p. 25). In their research, members of the faculty "have published research that foregrounds racial, ethnic, cultural, class, gender, and religious differences" (p. 26). Faculty consider not only diverse content and curricula, but also "a range of pedagogical and methodological approaches to the teaching of difference" (p. 25). Faculty bring this work into the classroom in a variety of thoughtful manners. This may in part account for the marked improvements in URM representation. The Self-Study also credits this to increasing faculty diversity, a strategy that should continue. From Fall 2016 to Fall 2020, URM students increased from 12.8% to 25.9% of the MEP, and first generation college students from 20.5% to 37% (p. 17).

Surprisingly, the majority of applicants (60%) list "a desire for self-development and self-actualization" (p. 13), rather than career development or progress toward additional graduate work. This suggests that MEP curriculum should contain a healthy emphasis on the sorts of teaching that are near and dear to most humanities faculty, not the career-training work but the focus on literature, culture, contemplation, and argumentation.

I see that "the English MA removed the culminating exam option from the program's manual," but that the option does still exist "on a case-by-case basis, in extenuating situations" (p. 24). If this option is not described in the program manual, students must rely on their advisors suggesting it. It is good to see that this change has led to greater coherence and mutual respect among students in the three MA tracks. However, if this option *does* still exist, it would perhaps be more equitable to note within the manual that this is an option available in extenuating situations so that students struggling with adverse circumstances might ask their advisors if it would be appropriate for them. Alternatively, it could be eliminated as an option. As it stands, though, it is up to faculty to individually determine if they believe that a student is in need of this, and this introduces opportunities for bias and inequity.

The Department's Five Year Plan looks to address key student needs both within and beyond the program. To wit, they outline five actions (abbreviated from pp. 43-44):

1. Advocate better pay structure and career development trajectory for students
2. Make MA degree more affordable, balancing students' pace of self-development with timely graduation

3. Advocate for limited residency Creative Writing program to bring revenue, recruitment, opportunity, and prestige
4. Explore connecting with Music, Art, Nursing, and Counseling to create interdisciplinary medical humanities or ecocritical area
5. Explore possibility of community writing center

The Self-Study is resolute in its support for program alumni, refusing to accept the standard excuses for low pay and poor job prospects (p. 43). It would be interesting to learn what concrete steps that Department plans to undertake in furtherance of this goal. Similarly, I would appreciate details regarding making the MA more affordable. Programs across the Arts and Humanities, and even in the Social Sciences, could all benefit from such advocacy and affordability. Perhaps there are collaborative possibilities with other SSU departments, and/or with English departments at other CSUs.

The prospect of a community writing center is intriguing, and would be of a piece with the Department's long-standing "intellectual and institutional ties with the Sonoma State Writing Center dating back to 1997" (p. 44), as well as its association with The Sitting Room, a rather wonderful "non-profit women's library in Penngrove, CA" (p. 45) that I hope is a resource much valued by MEP students. This would also be in line with the Department's active encouragement of student applications to the College of Marin's Faculty Diversity Internship Program. These campus and community outreach efforts are laudable, and it is encouraging to see the Department considering additional outreach efforts at a time when budgetary pressures are driving many programs to fold in upon themselves.

7. Conclusion

Professor and former Chair Kiesbye describes the MEP as "the beating heart of the department." The MEP is, he argues, not only of value to the students enrolled in it. The program helps faculty, working in what is primarily a teaching institution, remain current in and energized about their own research. Further, MEP demonstrates for undergraduates that getting a bachelors need not be the final stage in their education, while modeling for them what the next stages of academic work look like. As Prof. Kiesbye phrases it, "the MA brings light into undergraduate studies... It is what connects the department to the larger world of academia, and gives the students a glimpse of how to take charge of their own interests in literature, and see their future as both scholars and teachers." This is all to say that the English Department as a whole — faculty, undergraduate students, and graduate students — have a vested interest in the survival and strengthening of the MEP. In practice, this would mean first and foremost the hiring of new faculty with expertise in English literary traditions outside of Britain, as well as in Creative Writing. These hires are needed not merely to fill out the ranks of the program. When the

impending retirements bring the TT/T faculty down to just four professors, the department will need more voices, more breath of interest and experience for students — graduate and undergraduate alike — to learn from. For comparison, here at Chico State (admittedly a larger campus), we have thirteen TT/T professors of English. CSU Humboldt, a considerably smaller campus than SSU, has nine TT/T professors of English, as does CSU Channel Islands, which is smaller still. Indeed, the smallest and most specialized campus in the system, CSU Maritime Academy — which has fewer than 900 students and does not even have an English Department — nonetheless has *six* TT/T professors who specialize in English language and literatures. (For enrollment data, see:

<https://www.calstate.edu/csu-system/about-the-csu/facts-about-the-csu/enrollment>; for English Department faculty lists, see: <https://www.csuchico.edu/engl/faculty-staff/>; <https://english.humboldt.edu/faculty-staff>; <https://english.csuci.edu/faculty.htm>; <https://www.csum.edu/culture-and-communication/faculty/>)

I have been tasked with providing an External Program Review for the Masters in English Program. I have attempted to do so with careful attention to the *Graduate Program Review, Sonoma State University, Master of Arts in English (Self-Study)*; the interviews I have conducted with administrators, faculty, and students; and information I have gleaned from Department, SSU campus, and CSU-system websites. It is my considered assessment that the MEP is succeeding very well in creating a welcoming environment, and fostering a thoughtfully inclusive program, advancing pedagogies that are responsive to student needs and to the most important conversations happening in the Humanities. The program is, though, managing this in a period of very serious decline in faculty numbers, and concomitant increases in uncompensated work. This is, in my estimation, not sustainable. SSU is faced with a decision: does it recommit to the English Department, or does it allow a department with excellent faculty and satisfied students — a department that is often considered one of the cornerstones of academia in a way that I acknowledge my own field is not — to continue to wither, shrinking randomly by faculty attrition through retirements, to the point where the graduate program, *and the undergraduate majors it supports*, must fold under the strain?

While I am sure that my position on this is clear, let me nonetheless state it in unambiguous terms: Sonoma State University should recommit to the English Department, and to its undergraduate and graduate programs; this renewed commitment should be embodied in the launching of searches for tenure-track faculty. These new hires, if searches are framed appropriately, can be fully in concert with the University's Graduation Initiative 2025 and its status as an Hispanic Serving Institution. I hope to see the University taking on this project, in partnership with the English Department, in the very near future.

Arts and Humanities Curriculum Committee

Fall 2023

English MA Program Review

The Arts and Humanities Curriculum Committee unanimously and enthusiastically commends the English Department for their reflective and comprehensive MA program review. We recognize the thoughtful approach the Department has taken to its program's opportunities and challenges. In particular, AHCC notes the following:

1. We recognize that this small program is important in cultivating scholars, writers, and teachers, including many of SSU's own composition tutors (at LARC) and instructors. (And we agree that SSU's pay for that tutoring and instructing is unfortunately low.) Beyond whatever FTES the program delivers, this program is a bridge between our undergraduates and the community.
2. We concur that, as a Hispanic Serving Institution, there is opportunity for English to collaborate with the Spanish faculty to deliver certain courses.
3. To have a fully functional program, the English department needs stronger support for its MA program. As the external reviewer notes in pages 16-17, the program is vastly under-resourced compared to other CSUs. To quote from the external review, "Current faculty are strained to the breaking point with teaching, service, and unsupported administrative work, with unremunerated advising and mentoring of students, and even

with simply meeting the course needs of MEP students from semester to semester. This situation is, in my estimation, unsustainable, and requires immediate administrative support.”

It is the hope of AHCC that, as the University emerges from its looming restructuring of Academic Affairs, it will re-invest in the English MA after years of shrinking support to what the external evaluator characterizes as a point of unsustainability.

Committee Membership:

Josh Glasgow (chair)
Stefan Kiesbye
Scott Horstein
Patricia Kim-Rajal
Tim Wandling
Mike Ezra
Michaela Grobbel
Stephanie Dyer
Liz Burch

November 21, 2023



Dean's Response to Masters in English Program (MEP) Self-Study

The Masters in English Program (MEP) has been a valued part of the Sonoma State University curriculum since 1967. It merges three tracks- Literary Criticism, Creative Writing and Rhetoric/English Education- for an engaging student experience. As noted in the English Department's detailed and thoughtful self-study, it has a history of turning out graduates who have been "active contributors to California's educational environment".

But now MEP finds itself at a crossroads. Several retirements and one faculty departure has impacted course offerings, advising and mentoring. The impending retirements of faculty currently in the FERP program will reduce TT/T faculty to only four professors. That presents a huge challenge for a program that has prided itself on academic excellence and student-centered instruction. As external reviewer Dr. Asa Simon Mittman pointed out, that number is considerably less than programs at similarly sized (and even smaller) CSUs. I share his view that the program needs university support for replacement hires to ensure both its quality and viability going forward.

I applaud the department's acknowledgement of and efforts to move past what it calls its "Anglo-centric" training to embrace issues of diversity and social justice in its curriculum, including more focus on BIPOC and LGBTQ writers and theorists. I also know from my own interactions with English faculty that SSU's designation as a Hispanic Serving Institution is important to them. There are ongoing conversations about collaborating with faculty members in programs such as Chicano and Latino Studies to expand literature course offerings in the program.

Finally, I would like concur with the external reviewer about what he described as "a model of collegiality and mutual support". MEP Faculty approach their educational mission with positivity, creativity and an openness to new ideas. It continues to be my pleasure to work with them.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Edward Beebout", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Edward Beebout

Interim Dean-School of Arts and Humanities

UPRS Findings and Recommendations Report

Dr. Chingling Wo represented the Master of Arts in English program at a meeting with UPRS on April 24, 2024, to discuss the program review materials submitted during the 2022-23 and 2023-24 academic years.

Curriculum

The curriculum is distinctive in the way it is structured so that students can appreciate the role of language in literature, communication, and storytelling. The English Master's Program allows students to take some upper-level undergraduate courses as part of the MA degree, which has the benefits of using resources (courses) well as part of a de facto 'stacked' curricular model, and of providing opportunities for undergraduates to learn from their graduate peers. The curriculum is very coherent and focuses on one-on-one mentoring by faculty. It is consistent with and even at the forefront of current practices in the discipline. The focus of the curriculum on Equity, Diversity and Inclusion is noted as being sincere and committed rather than being trendy. It is well-aligned with SSU's Hispanic Serving Institution status.

Nevertheless, the external reviewer notes that student experience can be somewhat lonesome, that they are asking for more structured in-class interaction with their faculty members, and there is a need for more graduate seminars that provide learning choices and also reduce time to graduation. Further, there appear to be gaps in the curriculum and execution, e.g., repetition of texts, lack of worldwide literature in English, among other issues. There is also a need for some restructuring and creative alignment of the department (and implicitly the curricular goals and methodologies) with that of SSU. As for concerns about reorganization, in the reviewer's words: "...it necessitates that the Department engage meaningfully with the restructuring process and look for any possible alignments and complementary goals. The University has some strategic initiatives and goals that I believe align very well with the stated values and objectives of the Department."

Assessment

The English department has long questioned the value of assessment, because of faculty perceptions that many of the department's pedagogical goals are inherently difficult to quantitatively measure. In discussion with Dr. Wo during her UPRS visit, we clarified the role of assessment in departments as part of the university's WASC requirements. Assessment need not necessarily be quantitative, and indeed many departments use qualitative methods to evaluate the

progress of students on the Program Learning Outcomes. The external reviewer, while appreciating the PLOs, also notes that there are definite opportunities to clarify the assessment methods.

Staffing and Resources

The English department MA is already lacking sufficient faculty for curricular needs, and is facing the retirement of key faculty members soon. This will significantly impact both the structure of the graduate curriculum (number and frequency of course offerings) and the substance of courses offered, especially in critical analysis and literature. The faculty are also stretched in terms of their advising loads and unpaid administrative work.

Students

The Student-Faculty ratio seems appropriate mostly although high in some cases, e.g., some seminars seem to have up to 20 students considered large for these programs. There appear to be opportunities to provide more information that can help in better interpretation of numbers. There also appear to be opportunities for streamlining course offerings and progression to cut costs for students and balance ‘pace of self-development with timely graduation,’ to be able to attract diverse student populations.

Program Review Process

The program review document is very well-written and creatively presented. It reflects, overall, that all faculty members are closely involved in the process. It is quite well-thought out in the manner it is written and presented. The faculty work closely with each other to address curricular decisions and the needs of the students. For example, the self-study and external reviewer’s report note how MEP faculty design curriculum that creates student awareness of the role of hegemonic language and culture, while also addressing students’ desire to “...acquire the ability to use language as a vehicle for empowerment and social change” (self-study pg. 32).

Commendations

- The English department Master’s Program demonstrates a strong commitment to providing a safe and inclusive learning environment.
- The MEP significantly increased enrollment of first-generation and URM students, especially those identifying as Hispanic. This is an encouraging achievement that befits SSU’s status as a Hispanic-Serving Institution,

Recommendations

- There is an urgent need for additional tenure-line faculty, both to replace retiring faculty and to broaden the curricular offerings to include newer areas of literature and writing.
- Compensate English faculty for essential work supervising thesis writing. Such supervision is an essential aspect of a graduate program, and should be reflected in faculty WTUs.
- The MEP should continue to explore the possibility of interdisciplinary alliances with other departments/programs, such as Spanish and CALS, NAMS, and AMCS. This could create symbiotic relationships that would enhance the English MA program as well as other departments.
- Clarify the specific assessment methods used. For example, interviews and surveys of MEP students revealed a ‘disconnect’ between faculty and students with regard to their understanding of two of the program learning outcomes. This is a valuable insight that faculty appear to be using in their curriculum revision. More such data from written assessment instruments would be useful.
- Explore additional ties with Teach Ed to work toward mutual goals of educating future teachers.

Action Plan: English MA Program			
Rec	Action	Responsibility	Planned Completion (e.g. by mid-cycle)
1	Revise the English MA curriculum in a manner informed by program review and within the context of serving new enrollment populations and being sustainable in the current resource climate, as outlined in the Spring 2025 program suspension letter.	Department	early cycle
2**	Complete yearly assessments as outlined by the Program Assessment Plan developed for the English MA revision.	Department, Academic Programs	throughout cycle
3**	Actively engage in Annual Program Reports in ways that are meaningful for iterative program improvement. Include the assessment data and analysis in reports and the next program review.	Department, Academic Programs	throughout cycle
4**	Closely monitor enrollments in the courses for the revised curriculum to consider if additional spacings between offerings might boost class enrollments while remaining feasible for student progress through the program	Department, Faculty Associate Dean	throughout cycle

**early cycle = Years 1-2; mid-cycle = Years 3-5; late cycle = Years 6-7*

***dependent upon reinstatement of the MA*

cc: Dr. Brantley Bryant, Chair Department of English; Dr. Troi Carleton, Dean College of HSSA; Dr. Stacey Bosick, Interim Provost and Vice President of Academic Affairs

Finalized: May 21, 2026