

Program Review Report Summary

1. **Reporting Institution** Eastern Illinois University
2. **Program Reviewed** M.A. in English
3. **Date** 14 January 2019
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5. **Overview**

As one of the initial members of EIU's Graduate School's First Choice Program in 2007, the English Department's MA Program continues to uphold the Graduate School's mission of "advancing the professional and personal lives of our students" through "rigorous study and professional development." Students complete the 33-credit program by selecting one of three areas of concentration: Literary and Cultural Studies; Rhetoric and Composition; or Creative Writing. While each concentration has designated courses that students must complete, the single required course for all MA students is English 5000 (Introduction to Methods and Issues in English Studies). The MA Program also offers a Certificate in the Teaching of Writing (18-credit certificate), which is tied to the program's very successful Eastern Illinois Writing Project (affiliated with and supported by funds from the National Writing Project). The MA Program offers competitively awarded graduate assistantships, including a Presidential Assistantship that is awarded annually. Graduate assistants (GAs) staff EIU's Writing Center, support faculty research through summer research assistantships, and may choose to participate in the department's Mentored Teaching Program (MTP), a program designed to train graduate students in writing pedagogy for teaching at community colleges or in preparation for doctoral study. Overseen by the Graduate Coordinator and the Directors of Composition and the Writing Center, the MTP is one of the program's signature features for GAs and on-campus students, and is the only one of its kind in the state of Illinois. The MTP has proven to be an effective recruitment tool, offers students a competitive edge in their career paths, and provides a core experience (of writing pedagogy) for the concentrations. MA students are active participants in scholarly and creative projects both in the EIU community and in regional and national conferences. Graduates of the program (approximately 100 since 2012) have used their degree for a number of career paths in English studies and beyond, with the most common including obtaining or enhancing teaching careers at community colleges or high schools; working as professional writers (across the spectrum of business and industry) or in the publishing industry; and pursuing a PhD degree. As of Fall 2018, students may now complete the MA degree and Certificate in the Teaching of Writing online.

6. Major Findings and Recommendations

6.a. Description and assessment of any major changes in the program [e.g., (a) changes in the overall discipline of field; (b) student demand; (c) societal need; (d) institutional context for offering the degree; (e) other elements appropriate to the discipline in questions].

Changes in the discipline. As with most academic programs, changes in the field of English studies are frequent. Some of the most important changes for the English Department's MA Program include broadening of cultural studies to be even more diverse and inclusive; increased emphasis on media studies and digital literacies; and continued high interest in professional writing. While writing pedagogy has long been a staple of English studies, there is increasing demand for training writing teachers in ESL and ELL, a demand that is very present at EIU in, for instance, English 1000 (Fundamentals of College Composition), 1001G (College Composition I), and 1002G (College Composition II). As a result of such changes, the MA Program has shifted from offering graduate seminars based around a model oriented toward historical coverage of literary history to more frequent seminars that embrace historical and cultural diversity and media studies. Such courses not only address disciplinary trends, but also provide an effective way to offer seminars that are useful for students in all our concentrations and that promote research projects geared to students' professional careers. The department is currently developing new seminars to address the need for topic-based courses. Graduate faculty have also adjusted peer-tutoring and writing pedagogy

courses (for GAs in the Writing Center and MTP) to help graduate students prepare for the changing learning needs of the secondary and postsecondary writing classroom.

Student demand and success. The graduate program in English attracts students largely from Illinois and the Midwest, with a small but significant number of international students. The MA program is also important for high school educators (across the state) as it provides access to advanced coursework, an MA degree, and a professional network of writing teachers. Either the MA or the Certificate in the Teaching of Writing also qualifies high school educators to teach dual credit courses. This group accounts for the significant increase in enrollment in the past year. Although enrollment over the review period has trended downward (in line with other graduate programs in the humanities nationwide), enrollment since spring 2018 has spiked upwards, a trend largely due to modifications to the curriculum and admissions process, to the attractiveness of the Certificate in the Teaching of Writing, and to offering the entire MA program online. It is also important to note that the department's graduate program has proven to be an effective "bridge" program for professionals seeking a career change—either from the business sector to education or from the high school classroom to careers in professional writing.

Societal needs. Since the 2011 IBHE Program Review Summary, English studies as a discipline has been severely challenged by the nationwide decline in enrollment in the humanities and the recent state-wide budget crisis that directly affected English and writing teachers at all levels. Currently, qualified English teachers at the high school and post-secondary level are in high demand. In addition, MA programs have become very attractive for teachers and professionals, especially if these programs offer degrees or certificates online. While the English Department's MA Program experienced a decline in enrollment during this review period and attrition in graduate faculty, the new online MA program, Certificate in the Teaching of Writing, and the on-campus MTP initiative have poised the department's program to be competitive and successful in the coming years.

Institutional context. The recent state budget crisis and its associated impacts on the university has led to some reductions in institutional support for the MA in English. Most notably, the College of Arts and Humanities previously provided some supplementary support for graduate assistant tuition waivers, funding which has been eliminated. In the current year, the Provost provided some additional funding for a student worker, which has offset the gap in assistantships to some degree.

6.2 Description of major findings and recommendations, including evidence of learning outcomes and identification of opportunities for program improvement; Assessment.

During this report period, the learning objectives for the MA in English have been revised. Currently, they are as follows:

- English graduate students will develop and refine their critical thinking and written communication skills.
- English graduate students will acquire focused understanding of particular literary works within appropriate critical, cultural, and/or historical contexts.
- English graduate students will develop appropriate professional-level research and bibliographic skills.
- English graduate students in the Creative Writing concentration will gain skill in creative expression.
- English graduate students in the Composition/Rhetoric and Professional Writing concentrations will acquire focused understanding of particular areas and problems within the theory and practice of composition studies
- English graduate students will prepare for further advanced study in literature or for educational, professional, and other careers.

The English Department's MA Program has a robust assessment procedure, which has received the highest scores from EIU's University Committee for the Assessment of Student Learning (CASL). The assessment process begins with admission into the MA program, which requires a professional statement, CV, writing sample, and two letters of recommendation. During this review period, the English Department elected to no longer require GRE scores for admission, primarily due to their inconvenience for prospective students, high cost, and unreliability for discipline of English studies. Once admitted, graduate students are then assessed at two points (often more) during their first year (in English 5000 and in their peer-tutoring). In the curriculum prior to Fall 2018, graduate students were then assessed in their second year of study through (1) their capstone prospectus, (2) their capstone project (either thesis or exam), and then (3) in their defense. With the MA Program's new curriculum (Fall 2018), students can now elect

to complete the program without a capstone project. As such, the department is developing a new assessment protocol, a procedure that will also need to include appropriate assessment of the online degree program.

6.3 Description of actions taken since the last review, including instructional resources and practices, and curricular changes.

Instructional resources and practices. Until Fall 2018, the department's MA Program has been largely an on-campus program, with instructional practices and resources taking place in the classroom and the Writing Center. Over the last three years, the department has been selectively offering graduate seminars online, a process that culminated in offering the entire degree online in Fall 2018. As with other University programs that offer degrees online, graduate faculty require training for online delivery of courses. Beyond the university-wide training, the Graduate Studies Committee in English is currently working on professional development opportunities for faculty regarding online graduate teaching.

Faculty hires. Despite recent funding issues, we were fortunate to make two replacement hires in creative writing. Given the continuing student interest in this area (a trend nationally), these two faculty members are essential to our ability to continue to offer the creative writing emphasis in the MA; specifically, they provide support in the area of fiction writing, an area in which we had experienced several unexpected departures in recent years.

Curricular changes. Since the 2011 IBHE Program Review Summary, the English Department has continued to adjust its MA program in order to keep current with changes in the field of English studies, to respond to the national decline in enrollment in the humanities, and to develop online courses and an online program. The following items are the most significant changes:

1. Eastern Illinois Writing Project (National Writing Project). Since 2008, EIU has been offering professional development programming as a site of the National Writing Project. One component of the EIWP is the summer institute, a 6-credit course that forms a core part of the Certificate in the Teaching of Writing. The EIWP summer institute is a professional development opportunity for K-12 teachers in all disciplines. Instructors study and practice writing and the teaching of writing. These teachers have been offered stipends, funded through grants from the National Writing Project, which offset the fees for the course, while the Graduate School has provided tuition waivers as a match for these grants. During the review period, approximately 100 educators have participated in a summer institute. Each summer since 2011, the institute participants have produced documents offering valuable teaching tools produced by participants as part of their work in the program, thus providing outreach to teachers beyond those participating. In addition, the EIWP provides a single-day continuing education program for teachers each fall.

Currently, the summer institute has twice as many applicants for summer 2019 as seats available. Efforts are underway to train an additional instructor so that two sections of the summer institute can be offered in 2020 to keep up with demand.

2. Certificate in the Teaching of Writing (CTW). Implemented in Fall 2011, the CTW was designed as a program (18 credit hours) for certified K-12 teachers of English/Language Arts to help augment their professional development in writing pedagogy—professional development that could be used towards required Illinois recertification and/or towards an MA degree. Changes to CTW over the last 5 years include: (1) developing hybrid and online versions of the summer course; and (2) adjusting the focus from K-12 to K-16 to include writing teachers at the community college level.

Developed from the success of our Eastern Illinois Writing Project Summer Institute, the CTW's primary goal is to develop increased theoretical and practical understanding of writing pedagogies, including National Writing Project (NWP) principles that see all literacies as interconnected. Accordingly, learning goals of the CTW embrace strategic (or framing) goals from the National Writing Project as well as include specific learning objectives from the English Department's MA Program. In addition to the core requirement of English 5585 (6 credits), students complete four additional writing or theory courses, and typically complete the certificate in 1.5 to 2 years. Students may apply all 18 credits toward the MA degree.

3. Reduced number of concentrations from 4 to 3. The MA Program removed Professional Writing as an official concentration (Spring 2017) primarily due to staffing issues. The success of professional writing at the undergraduate level (number of courses on-campus and online), alongside faculty retirements and attrition, made the graduate-level concentration difficult to staff. Graduate students may still take courses in professional writing (at the graduate or advanced undergraduate level) but do so to augment one of the three other concentrations.
4. Curriculum change and Online MA Program. In Spring 2017, the English Department approved a significant curriculum change and approved offering the full MA Program online. These two changes were the result of internal assessment and discussion over the last three years. During this time, all graduate courses were revised for online delivery (in accordance with Council on Graduate Studies guidelines). The curriculum changes include: (1) reducing concentrations from 4 to 3 (as discussed in item #3 above); (2) streamlining requirements in the concentrations to allow for greater flexibility in combining concentrations; and (3) allowing students a choice in whether to complete a capstone project. These curricular changes—and implementing the full MA Program online—went into effect with the Fall 2018 catalog.
5. New Graduate Courses. During this review period, the main adjustments to the curriculum were detailed in Item #4 (above). Other minor (but significant) adjustments include redefining the role of English 5011 and 5061. Both are topics-based courses and therefore have become important courses in how they connect the concentrations. The department has also articulated more effectively how its advanced undergraduate professional writing courses can meet the needs of graduate students. The department developed English 5025 (Creative Writing Professional Development), a 1-credit required course for students in the creative writing concentration that assists students in developing their work for publication and public presentation.

6.4 Description of actions to be taken as a result of this review, including instructional resources and practices, and curricular changes.

The assessment and review that resulted in the MA Program's new curriculum and in its online degree program have also resulted in the need for the following important items:

- New mission statement and learning objectives to accommodate the new curriculum and online degree program;
- Focused study on the relationship between the online and on-campus programs, including a study of the demographics of students (their goals and professional needs);
- New assessment procedure for online programs that articulates with on-campus experience;
- Study of ways to use the independent study experience to help tailor study plans to meet students' professional goals, especially students who choose to combine concentrations or who may want to add courses from other academic departments.

7. Responses to Institution-Assigned Issues

7.1 Describe departmental strategies for sustaining the first-choice status of the graduate program.

As described in the overview, the English Department's graduate program has maintained First Choice designation since 2007. The First Choice designation is based on sustained level of achievement based on criteria established by the graduate school, including advancing scholarship, maintaining diversity in students and course offerings, and research activity by faculty and students. Although the department experienced declining enrollment during the bulk of the review period, the MA Program is currently experiencing growth and is situated to be competitive as it meets the needs of graduate students and professionals in the field of English studies.

7.2 Describe department plans to support integrative learning. The MA in English continues to support integrative learning practices for graduate students through (a) encouraging graduate students to propose to and present at professional conferences; (b) encouraging them to present at on-campus student research venues; (c) our mentored teaching program; (d) inviting graduate students to present their work as part of the Hennings Reading Series; (e) preparing students who choose the thesis option for public thesis defenses.

7.4 What one unique, noteworthy activity is the department involved in that will enable the IBHE to distinguish it from other programs in the state?

The signature feature of the program is the Mentored Teaching Program (MTP). Designed to equip students with strong theoretical and practical experience in writing pedagogy, the MTP is unique in MA programs across the state. To complete the program, students must complete (in the fall semester) English 5500 (a 1-credit course in peer tutoring that students are required to take for their work in the Writing Center) and English 5007 (Composition Pedagogies). In the spring semester, students then must enroll in English 5502 (Mentored Composition Teaching), where in addition to completing a 15-week seminar in effective classroom practices for writing pedagogy, students are also assigned a faculty mentor who is teaching first-year writing course. Students must attend all class sessions over the semester as they work with their faculty mentor in preparing assignments, grading/responding to papers, and actual teaching. By the end of the semester, students not only have gained practical teaching experience, but also will have developed a teaching portfolio (teaching statement, syllabi, assignments) to demonstrate their experience. After completing these courses, students may then apply to teach a first-year writing course (typically in the fall semester of the student's second year), where they would be the primary instructor for the course (under the supervision of the Director of Composition). The MTP is unmatched in the theoretical and practical training students receive. In addition, the MTP is currently being revised to incorporate training in online teaching and topics related to ELL/ESL, features that will make students even more competitive.

In addition, to our knowledge, EIU is currently the only university in Illinois offering an MA in English that can be completed entirely online. As we work to continue developing this program in keeping with our traditions of high quality education, we hope this offering will become another of our distinguishing features.

8. Outcome

8.1 Decision:

- Program in Good Standing
- Program flagged for Priority Review
- Program Enrollment Suspended

8.2 Explanation

On behalf of the office of Academic Affairs, I appreciate the faculty and program's commitment to curricular innovation, particularly in light of the recent, historical challenges related to enrollment and resources. The graduate faculty are to be commended for their efforts relative to on-going assessment and its impact on student success. Finally, the report clearly demonstrates a program geared towards academic excellence.

Dean's Comments

Among the First Choice Master's programs at EIU, the English MA nonetheless experienced an enrollment decline during the review period that was consistent with the overall trend at the University. However, the Department's nimble response to the enrollment crisis is worthy of recognition, and evidence of a rebound is present in the last academic year. The program's Mentored Teaching Program to prepare high school and post-secondary writing instructors has been key to this turnaround, as have the continual refining and streamlining of the curriculum and the expanded online presence. Assessment is robust and mature, but

ever-evolving. All this, combined with the growing need for secondary/post-secondary English teachers across the state, makes the program's outlook very promising.