Two Year Progress Report of the
Department of English Language and Literature, Faculty of Arts

(submitted March 2014; revised May 2015)

Introduction

English Language and Literature is the largest humanities department at the University of Waterloo and it offers robust and popular undergraduate and graduate programs. English currently has the third largest departmental undergraduate program in the Faculty of Arts (after Psychology and Economics), the second largest PhD program (after Psychology), and the largest research MA program. The Department is distinguished by its integration of the study of English literature, rhetoric, professional and technical writing, and digital media in a single disciplinary unit. Unlike other English departments in Canada, English at Waterloo combines elements of communication design, digital culture, and writing studies with literary studies. The creative focus in this English Department is different, too: we teach and research the making of technical writing, business communication, and digital media with literary and rhetorical sophistication. English at Waterloo is further distinguished by its humanistic approach to pragmatic issues of communication and interpretation. The Department is accordingly well connected with local enterprise through faculty and alumni contacts and through Co-op. The Department of English Language and Literature has offered regular Co-op since 1978, and it continues to be the only humanities department at Waterloo that does so. English offers Co-op through three Honours BA streams (Literature; Literature and Rhetoric; and Rhetoric and Professional Writing) and three MA streams (Literary Studies; Rhetoric and Communication Design; and Experimental Digital Media), and is investigating the possibility of adding to these a Co-op PhD option. We are determined to be Canada’s go-to department for the study of communication with literary finesse; for a pragmatic inflection on humanistic education; and for a historically-informed engagement with technical creation.

The most recent self-study of the Department of English Language and Literature was completed in June, 2010 by Associate Chair (Undergraduate) Kate Lawson. The Academic Program Review of English Undergraduate Programs, authored by external reviewers Heather Murray (University of Toronto) and Dale Sullivan (North Dakota State University), and by internal reviewer Steve Furino (Faculty of Mathematics), dated December 23, 2010, was received in January, 2011. A full response to the review, with a seven-year plan for English Language and Literature, was submitted on April 11th, 2011 by the Chair of English Language and Literature, Fraser Easton. Dr. Easton’s response and seven-year plan also addressed the recommendations made the previous year by the reviewers of the Department’s graduate programs, Jo-Ann Wallace (University of Alberta) and Richard Grusin (formerly of Wayne State University; now at the University of Wisconsin--Milwaukee), whose OCGS Consultants’ Report on the English Graduate Programs was submitted in May 2010. The present report outlines the progress that English Language and Literature has made since April 2011, with a focus on
undergraduate programs. In addition, the present report specifically addresses the recommendations of the Academic Program Review of English Undergraduate Programs.

Summary

The Academic Program Review of English Undergraduate Programs found English Language and Literature to be a “very well-managed and collegial unit with excellent esprit de corps among its full-time faculty members, its staff members, and even (this is more unusual) its sessional-stipendary instructors.” The review noted that English at Waterloo was distinctive in offering an undergraduate program that ambitiously and successfully aims 1. to provide a “unique suite of courses in rhetoric and professional writing [and] digital media,” 2. to offer a “full service” of English literary studies with robust historical coverage, and 3. “to have these [three] streams work synergistically together.” The review also suggested that “given its size and the demographics of its faculty, ELL [English Language and Literature] is already ‘punching above its weight.’”

Below are particular recommendations from the Academic Program Review, as well as areas of concern, and the actions taken by English Language and Literature in response to these suggestions and observations since April 2011. Also below is a list of new ideas and initiatives that were not included in previous reports or the Department’s seven-year plan.

1. Actions taken as proposed in the two-year plan

a) Curriculum

i) Recommendation: That the Department give stronger definition to its program streams, simplify the pathway strands, and re-envision the goals of the Literature stream in particular.

Response: During her preparation of the self-study for the Academic Program Review, the then Associate Chair (Undergraduate) Kate Lawson simultaneously embarked upon a full review of our undergraduate plan structures and curriculum. As a result of this review, and after wide consultation, Dr. Lawson proposed a new model for representing the program streams, the pathways through the curriculum, and the course offerings. This new curricular model met the stated goal, in Dr. Easton’s response to the external reviewers, to “smooth” curricular offerings in all English programs.

More particularly, Dr. Lawson’s curriculum map gave much stronger definition to the architecture of the Rhetoric and Professional Writing program and redefined the Literature program according to one index—temporal periods—rather than according to the mix of temporal and geographical (British versus North American) indices that the unreformed plan utilized. The new curriculum map was thoroughly reviewed by the Department and by the larger English Discipline Group and successfully approved during the tenure of the subsequent Associate Chair (Undergraduate) Heather Smyth in 2011-12. The new curriculum map passed the Faculty of Arts Undergraduate Affairs Group in
2013 and appeared in the 2014-15 Calendar. We plan to assess the success of the new map in the coming years through the monitoring of the popularity of English degree plans and through consultations with students.

This new, revised curriculum map satisfies several of the External Reviewers’ recommendations: 1. it offers greater clarity to students in identifying the pedagogical intent of their plan requirements and the pathways through the degrees; 2. it shifts some emphasis away from periods of British literature in the core curriculum for those students who choose to shape their programs differently (see below 1.a.iii); 3. it increases the number of open English electives; and 4. it gives a new capstone function to final-year Special Topics courses focused on particular areas of study (see below 1.a.ii).

The new curriculum map was developed further in early 2015 in concert with a Faculty of Arts “plan standardization” initiative. Jay Dolmage, the current Associate Chair (Undergraduate), used this initiative as an occasion to propose changes to the English plans that streamline progress in the Honours degrees and harmonize Honours plans with the four-year General degree plans. Dr. Dolmage also took this as an opportunity to clarify the Notes in the Calendar text of all of the Department’s plans (Notes list exceptions, recommendations, and other guidelines that do not appear in the text of the degree plan; they appear as footnotes below the degree plan text). Clarification of plan Notes will help reduce plan complexities and make the requirements and exceptions easier for students to understand. It is expected that these changes will appear in the 2016-17 Calendar; currently, they have been approved by Department of English and by the Faculty of Arts Undergraduate Affairs Group.

The Department has also made some plan-specific changes. In 2013 the Department reviewed and simplified the Rhetoric and Professional Writing plan by removing from this plan the requirements of a Computer Science course and two courses in a language other than English. The need for the Computer Science course had been superseded by developments in digital technologies. The language courses were no longer needed because the Rhetoric and Professional Writing plan is less focused on linguistics than it had once been. In addition, the Computer Science course requirement was removed from all English Co-op plans for the same reason it was removed from the Rhetoric and Professional Writing plan. The Undergraduate Committee is currently revising the digital communication and professional writing courses in the Rhetoric and Professional Writing curriculum to clarify and streamline further the degree pathways. The Department has already created a Technical Writing Minor and Specialization, as well as several new courses in the area of technical communication, that relate to Rhetoric and Professional Writing plan elements (see 3.a. below). The overall revision will remain mindful that digital communication and professional writing courses play a key role in several English plan cursus, including those of the Rhetoric and Professional Writing major (which, since professional writing digitized in the 1990s, must perforce have a strong digital rhetoric and media component), the Digital Media Studies Specialization, and the Technical Writing Minor and Specialization.
ii) **Recommendation**: That the Department consider offering fourth-year specialized and advanced topics courses in a smaller class or seminar setting.

**Response**: As part of the revision of its curriculum map, the Department replaced ENGL 301H: Honours Literary Studies, which was required in the Honours Literature and in the Honours Literature and Rhetoric plans, with one of a set of 400-level Special Topics courses, now required for students in all three Honours plans. We changed the pre-requisites on our existing Special Topics courses from 3A to 4A Honours English; modernized the titles of the existing courses; and created new Special Topics courses to reflect the new course groupings in our plans. The Department is committed to offering the Special Topics courses regularly to enable fulfillment of this new Honours plan requirement. Resources permitting, these Special Topics courses will be offered in a smaller seminar format, which will create more smaller class settings in English.

iii) **Recommendation** Literature students expressed a wish for more upper-year courses in the areas of global literatures, Canadian, contemporary, and genre studies, and a concern about having too many required courses in British literature. The Academic Program Review recommended that the Department adjust requisites so the ‘core’ curriculum is less focused on British literature.

**Response**: This recommendation was based partly on an error of understanding about the number of required British literature courses, as noted in the April 11, 2011 report by Dr. Easton, Chair of English. It also did not acknowledge the distinctive focus of English at Waterloo—compared to other smaller departments of English—on the historical study of literatures in English, which is why, under the new curriculum map, we require Honours Literature students to take four courses in areas of literature in English before 1800, two courses in areas of nineteenth-century literature in English, and two courses in areas of literature in English after 1900 (students may, of course, take additional elective courses in modern and contemporary literature in English).

Nevertheless, the new curriculum map is not unmindful of the spirit of the reviewers’ concerns, as expressed here, since the new map divides the literature courses solely by temporal period instead of by both temporal period (for British and Commonwealth literatures) and geography (British and Commonwealth; North American). While still anchored in historical approaches to literature, the new map gives students interested in North American or global literatures in English the option of fulfilling more of their required upper-level literature courses with courses from those areas. The curriculum change also creates an opening for future course creations in earlier periods of Canadian, American, and global English literatures.

New courses in global English literatures (ENGL 280: Literatures of Migration and ENGL 291: Global Literatures) have been created, and discussion of new courses in global English literatures at the 300- and 400-level are planned. ENGL 294: Game Studies and ENGL 295: Social Media have been created. New courses in writing and composition studies—particularly professional writing fields such as Grant Writing—have also been developed (ENGL 210G: Grant Writing, ENGL 210J: Technical Editing,
and ENGL 472: Research Methods in Technical Communication. Finally, both the Digital Media Studies specialization and the English Literature in a Global Context specialization (renamed Global Literatures) have been revised.

In order to continue to measure our program improvements against student expectations and preferences, the Undergraduate Committee in English is also developing an online exit survey to be offered to graduating students each year (likely using Survey Monkey) to find out what they liked and disliked about their programs and what changes they would like to see. We will also monitor the popularity of the English undergraduate degrees, both at Waterloo and at other universities, as another measure of the impact of our curriculum changes.

iv) **Note:** “Certain areas—most notably First Nations/Aboriginal Literatures—are unrepresented in the curriculum.”

**Response:** A new course, ENGL 211: First Nations, Metis and Inuit Literatures, has been created and will be offered for the first time in Fall 2015.

**b) Faculty and Staff complement**

i) **Recommendation:** The review team noted that the Department’s rhetoric and digital media program is “one of the leading programs of its kind in North America” and that “only a few English, communication, or rhetoric programs in North America offer [our] range of rhetorical studies.” They expressed a concern about the need for more faculty members with expertise to teach our rhetoric courses. “Attention to staffing issues—replacement in key areas, positions in new fields, sufficient staffing to deploy full-time faculty more fully at the 300- and 400-levels—would be, in our opinion, the *sine qua non* for further program growth and reputational enhancement.” More particularly, the report recommended the addition of faculty lines in the areas of the specializations (Digital Media, Global Literatures), as well as in Romanticism, to fill key program needs.

**Response:** English at Waterloo is unique for embedding the study of digital media and digital communication within the well-established field of multimodal rhetoric. Thanks to significant additional resources being provided to English Language and Literature since April 2011, the Department, with the support of the Dean of Arts, Douglas Peers, has been able to dedicate new, incremental tenure-stream positions to some areas of key program need, and to make very strong hires, beginning with Beth Coleman (Digital Media) in 2012 and Frances Condon (Writing Studies, Critical Race Studies) in 2013 on the Rhetoric and Professional Writing side. Also on the Rhetoric and Professional Writing side, we await the arrival of Ashley Kelly (Technical Communication), who will join us on 1 July 2015. In addition, two Definite Term Lecturers in Rhetoric and Professional Writing areas joined us in 2014: Bruce Dadey (Business Communication) and Stephanie White (Composition Studies). On the Literature side we hired Jennifer Harris in 2013 (Nineteenth-Century American Literature) and John Savarese in 2014 (British Romanticism). It should be noted that the External Reviewers identified British Romanticism as a key gap in our faculty expertise and program capacity and that
American Literature is among the most popular areas of specialization among our PhD students.

**ii) Recommendation:** “ELL [English Language and Literature] should contemplate ways to move more tenured and tenure-track faculty into its upper year courses.”

**Response:** As detailed above, with the support of the Dean of Arts, Douglas Peers, we have made several incremental new tenure-stream hires in Rhetoric and Professional Writing (Coleman, Condon, and Kelly) as well as in areas of literature in English (J. Harris and Savarese), permitting us to place tenure-track faculty increasingly in both the upper-year courses and in the important recruitment sphere of first-year classes, which aids us in attracting students to the English major. Another new tenure-track colleague in English, Vinh Nguyen (Diaspora Literatures), will arrive at Renison University College in July 2015; he will contribute to teaching in the area of global English literatures and global Englishes, supporting student interest in these areas and providing further expertise for the Global Literatures Specialization. Our new commitment (see section 3.b., “Mathematics English Language Proficiency Initiative,” below) to teach ENGL 109: Introduction to Academic Writing to Faculty of Mathematics students in a small-section on campus format that is largely faculty taught will place more tenure-stream faculty in the ENGL 109 classroom. This new model of ENGL 109 delivery will draw some faculty members in English away from upper-year teaching in the English plan courses; despite that, however, we are making overall progress on moving more tenure-stream faculty into upper-level courses, which the addition of one or two strategic tenure-stream positions in rhetoric and in language studies would advance significantly. Other commitments to be mindful of in terms of program impacts: the Department delivers two courses a year for the Masters of Public Service program, currently taught by Frankie Condon; we continue to grapple with a historical legacy of understaffing in the Rhetoric and Professional Writing areas; and the tenure-stream English faculty at St. Jerome’s and Renison specialize in literature fields. More tenure-stream faculty are needed for the delivery of core upper-level Rhetoric and Professional Writing courses.

**iii) Recommendation:** That English hire a Distance Education [now known as Extended Learning or EL] coordinator to ensure quality of distance education [EL or online] courses and provide support for sessional instructors.

**Response:** In 2011, Dorothy Hadfield was hired as a Definite Term Lecturer in English to teach and to serve as the Department’s Extended Learning Coordinator, a major role. Dr. Hadfield has been teaching and coordinating the large online [EL] courses such as ENGL 210F: Genres of Business Communication, has significantly redeveloped and refreshed this very popular and important course, and has engaged in the long-term revision and refreshing of the online offerings to support the online three-year General English degree and expand our online commitments.

**iv) Concern:** “Office/administrative staffing in ELL [English Language and Literature] appears inadequate for a unit with so many students, programs, and involvements, and where further growth (especially at the graduate level) is impending. Further, the current
allocation and scheduling of duties does not allow highly-competent staff members to use their time efficiently and effectively.” The Reviewers recommended hiring a clerical assistant for the Department. This would also allow the Undergraduate Coordinator to do more advising and free the Associate Chair (Undergraduate) for “more urgent tasks.”

Response: The new commitment with the Faculty of Mathematics to teach multiple small on-campus sections of ENGL 109 has brought with it a 0.5 staff position, but this does not address the recommendation of the reviewers or the escalating Departmental need for a full-time clerical assistant.

v) Concern: “‘Service’ and DE [EL/online] teaching rests largely on stipendiary-sessional instructors, with the rest devolving to graduate instructors. . . . This has the benefit of releasing regular faculty for on-campus classes... However, the reliance of ELL [English Language and Literature] on stipendiary and graduate instructors is at an alarming level.”

Response: The Department’s new and in-coming, incremental tenure-stream and definite-term faculty appointments are intended to ease this pressure and the situation will be monitored by the Chair of English and the Dean of Arts.

c) Procedures

i) Recommendation: That the Department increase communication with undergraduate students through a bulletin board or listserv.

Response: The Department has developed a Facebook page and a Twitter feed and prompted all instructors to circulate information about them to their classes via syllabi. The Facebook representative posts material regularly, drawing from a weekly series of interviews with English alumni posted on our Department blog, from other posts of interest to our students, and from content developed for our YouTube site, including career videos and videos of visiting speakers. The Facebook site has over 400 regular recipients at present. The former Associate Chair (Undergraduate), Dr. Smyth, also consulted with Amanda Connolly, Program Coordinator at Stratford campus, on English’s social media strategy and has worked with the Faculty of Arts to implement some of Ms. Connolly’s recommendations regarding high school outreach and the use of social media tools such as Facebook.

ii) Recommendation: That the Department consider offering a more regular cycle of course counselling, perhaps through group sessions at the end of each semester.

Response: Currently the faculty member Associate Chair (Undergraduate) and staff member Undergraduate Coordinator dedicate significant energies and resources to the effective and timely counselling of students, and work in close coordination with the advising done by the Chair of English at St. Jerome’s. The Department’s website offers a great deal of information to students, and during the website migration exercise in 2013, English focused on clarifying degree expectations and general advising information. We
continue to develop a FAQ page for general advising matters. In 2012-13 we created a series of annual cohort lunch events focused on the advising and general support needs of students at each year level.

**iii) Recommendation:** More training, monitoring, and feedback on teaching performance for sessional and graduate instructors.

**Response:** The Chair monitors and works with sessionals as appropriate, but in general their overall performance in the classroom is excellent, as represented by scores on the Arts Course Questionnaires for their courses. A new faculty member service role of Graduate Independent Course Coordinator was created by the Chair in 2011 and has served to provide support, oversight, and feedback on graduate independent course instructors. The new Lecturer in Business Writing, Dr. Dadey, is pioneering a new role as the Department’s TA Coordinator; he has proposed, designed, and implemented a Teaching Portal on the Department website for TAs and Graduate Independent instructors, and he is providing robust training, monitoring, support, and feedback for the Department’s large numbers of graduate TAs (approximately 90 TAships a year, currently).

**2. Recommendations not acted upon, but for which action is planned**

*a) Curriculum*

i) **Recommendation:** That the Department develop a longer ‘window’ of course offerings, allowing students a greater opportunity to select courses of interest and plan for their degree requirements, e.g., a course rotation schedule made available to students.

**Response:** As projected in Dr. Easton’s response to the reviewers, since the Fall of 2011, English Language and Literature has been submitting accurate course projections for pre-enrollment planning (now “enrollment” with the new timetabling system). The Department has also begun looking into new ways to communicate course offerings to students two terms in advance. With turnover in the Undergraduate Coordinator staff position, however, our ability to act on this recommendation has been delayed. We have now resumed our plan to address it.

*b) Procedures*

i) **Recommendation:** That the Department investigate the feasibility of instituting an annual assessment of the program through reading student portfolios or evaluating student papers from across the curriculum.

**Response:** The Faculty of Arts Advising Group already works closely with the Undergraduate Chair in English to monitor student progress at the end of each semester. The current Associate Chair (Undergraduate), Dr. Dolmage, contacts all students who have had recent “academic progression” issues, and meets in person with most of them. That said, the present recommendation, as well as the recommendation above regarding a
more regular cycle of course counselling, would constitute a significant new way of tracking students’ performance as they move through their programs in English. Adoption of these recommendations would also impact English Discipline Group faculty in the federated university and affiliated colleges (St. Jerome’s and Renison). We are currently striking a task force, with representation from English Discipline Group members at St. Jerome’s and Renison, to address these proposals.

3. New ideas or initiatives not included in previous reports or the seven-year plan

a) Technical Writing Minor: As of Fall 2015, English will launch a new, career-oriented minor in Technical Writing, open to all Waterloo students. A cognate specialization in Technical Writing has been created for English majors. These programs are built on our current and incoming faculty expertise in professional communication and technical writing and our Department’s longstanding juxtaposition of the rhetorical study of genres with the study of writing practices and communication design. The Technical Writing specialization will benefit our own majors by clarifying and strengthening the technical and professional writing core of our Rhetoric and Professional Writing Honours degree curriculum; it will also help prepare our students more pragmatically for Co-op and for careers. The Minor will offer to students in other undergraduate majors in Arts, and at Waterloo more broadly, professional writing expertise to which they can bring their own subject specializations for career purposes. These developments also support the Faculty of Arts Strategic Plan.

b) Mathematics English Language Proficiency Initiative: Jointly with the Department of Drama and Speech Communication in the Faculty of Arts, the Department of English at St. Jerome’s, and the English Language Studies unit at Renison, English Language and Literature has agreed to deliver small-section, regular faculty-taught course offerings to students in the Faculty of Mathematics (main campus English currently offers ENGL 109 and, with St. Jerome’s, ENGL 119). Mathematics asked for this course provision, and the former Provost, Geoff McBoyle, resourced it, for several reasons. One reason was to respond to the conclusions of the report by the ad hoc committee headed by Gordon Stubley on English Language Competency at the University of Waterloo (the so-called Stubley report, submitted October 2012). Another reason was in light of the feedback that Mathematics has received from Co-op employers and others about the English language abilities of its students. Two of the five incremental tenure-track positions noted above come as a result of this initiative; but they may not add incremental new teaching to the undergraduate programs in English due to the expected teaching in Mathematics. It is anticipated that the four new Definite Term Lecturers attached to this initiative (two for main campus English, and two for St. Jerome’s English) will teach entirely in connexion with it. This is a major improvement in the delivery of writing instruction to some students at Waterloo; it will pilot best practices for the delivery of ENGL 109 and ENGL 119 at the University; and it is an opportunity for English to bring its pedagogical expertise to bear on a key student need for students outside Arts. But it is not directly connected to the delivery of English’s own programs, or to those in Arts more generally.
c) **High School Outreach:** English has been working closely with the Arts Marketing and Recruitment team to support the scheduled recruitment events (Ontario Universities Fair, Fall Arts Showcase, March Break Open House), to coordinate outreach to students given offers of admission, and to offer content and stories as often as possible for Arts recruitment. The Associate Chair (Undergraduate) from main campus English has met with the St. Jerome’s Registrar to learn of their high school initiatives and main campus English works with St. Jerome’s to coordinate materials for recruitment events. St. Jerome’s and student volunteers also write personal letters to applicants to Waterloo and St. Jerome’s. We have been building relationships with teachers, guidance counsellors, and local school boards to develop on-campus enrichment visits and programs for high school English students and recruitment opportunities for our Department and Arts. English has worked with Renison University College to stage on-campus full-day workshops for the Waterloo District School Board creative writing awards and we are renewing our commitment to the High School Achievement test program. The current Associate Chair (Undergraduate), Dr. Dolmage, also coordinates campus visits with local high school enrichment students and travels to high schools locally and in the greater Toronto area to promote our programs.

d) **Peer Mentoring group:** At the initiative of an upper-year English major, Katie Jessup, the Department created a grassroots English Peer Mentoring group that pairs upper-year mentors with lower-year mentees and transfer students. The mentors are trained at the Student Success Office and also receive English-specific training. The group meets several times a term for social events, study sessions, and academic skills workshops and one-on-one mentoring happens throughout the term in person and through a Gmail account. The group helps to improve student experience and to build cohort relationships, offers students peer academic support, aids with recruitment into the major, and provides valuable skills and resume-building to our students. We coordinate our efforts and messaging in this area with Stephanie Bromley and the Arts Peer Mentoring initiative and with Laura Maple at the Student Success Office.

e) **Career Event:** In 2012, with the help of members of the English Advisory Council--led by noted broadcaster and Waterloo English alumnus Eric Friesen, and including such distinguished alumni and friends of English as George Elliott Clarke (Toronto Poet Laureate, Professor at the University of Toronto), Sandra Martin (Journalist with the Globe and Mail), Mandy Lam (marketing specialist at Open Text), and Scott Wahl (Vice-President of Software Services at BlackBerry)--we held a very successful and well-attended career panel with professionals from many fields who hold English degrees (BA, MA, PhD), most from Waterloo English. We videotaped the event and created two short videos and one long video that are posted on the English Department’s YouTube site for recruitment and career-counselling purposes. We will continue to involve our English Advisory Council in undergraduate career counselling and networking and will hold more events of this nature in future.

f) **Online Initiatives:** The EL Coordinator Dorothy Hadfield is overseeing the refreshing of our existing EL courses, and the creation of new ones, to enable more flexible completion of the on campus degrees as well as support for the fully online Three Year
General English degree. Future EL preparations are being targeted with the goals of 1. relieving some of the course bottlenecks in the plan requirements (for example, the core history of rhetoric courses ENGL 309A/B/C and the introductory linguistics course ENGL 306A) and 2. making it easier for students to take course requirements while on Co-op work terms or in a mix of online and on-campus academic terms. New online course creations may make an Honours English degree online possible. Course creation in new areas of digital media studies and rhetoric will maximize the resources of online delivery as a medium and will showcase the Department’s contribution to underserved fields of online offerings in North America.

Submitted by Fraser Easton
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