

## **INTEGRATED ACADEMIC AND RESEARCH PLAN: ENGLISH DEPARTMENT**

The English Department is dedicated to the study of literature, language, and culture, and we encourage our students to read, write, and think critically and creatively about how these forces shape our experiences. Our fields of study have long ago expanded well beyond traditional literary texts to include all forms of cultural production in many media. We teach our students to respect creativity, the imagination, and human expression through art, and to analyze literary and cultural narratives in all the forms those narratives take. In doing so, we seek inclusivity and diversity in our curriculum and methodologies.

### **ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE AND RENEWAL**

#### **Support for Faculty Members**

While English faculty members' research and creative work, pedagogy, and program development have kept pace with disciplinary and interdisciplinary transformations, the physical and institutional infrastructure within which we work has lagged behind. Here are our priorities:

1. Revitalized, dedicated seminar and classroom space in Manitoba and Centennial Halls: "smarter" Honours and Graduate seminar rooms and open-area rooms with moveable desks and chairs (and room to move them).
2. A Screening Room (ideally 3C01): a state-of-the-art digital multi-media theatre for film and media classes, conferences, film series, workshops, and interactive events.
3. A central, versatile Performance Venue for student cabarets and readings, book launches, debates, panel discussions, musical performances, and visiting speakers. A display area nearby could showcase completed works or research in progress, and advertise forthcoming events. It would be ideal to locate the UW's Art Gallery, currently in 1C01, in an adjoining space.
4. A well-equipped Conference Room (2M70) as a dedicated space for larger department and program meetings, debates, panel discussions, authors' readings, visiting speakers, and social events.
5. Dedicated English Department Contract Faculty offices with adequate furnishings and technology to support their teaching of large numbers of students, especially at the first- and second-year levels.
6. Multimedia Labs with high-speed Internet access and equipment for sound recording, graphic design, video editing, and various kinds of multimedia digital technology. It should not be difficult for a collaborative group presentation to include, for example, a scene from an opera, a television commercial, a Renaissance

painting, and a YouTube video of a poetry reading, all in one hour. This requires excellent multi-media equipment in the classroom and a lab in which students can work together to prepare a digital presentation in advance of class.

## **Technology**

Taken together, these initiatives will create a highly attractive opportunities for faculty and students to reach their full potential in pedagogical and technological innovation. Currently, however, English Department faculty members experience a mixed message from the University regarding technology use in the classroom. On one hand, we are encouraged to use it; on the other hand, we don't have enough reliable, working, up-to-date equipment, or enough access outside of class time to prepare and rehearse successful presentations. We also don't have adequate access to or ongoing, working relationships with Media and TSC staff.

In general, students are able to use technology for brief communications, simple PowerPoints, and basic website searches. But the skills they need involve more in-depth, sustained, intellectual thought. Unfortunately, too much emphasis on technology has led some students to think that it can help them learn faster, help them learn more than one thing at a time, or give them instant, twenty-four access to facts, thus eliminating the need for them to learn, remember, or think through the information they find. Thus, technology may actually be detrimental to many students' learning, however much they are habituated to its use. Teaching our students to think is our highest priority.

We want to enhance our students' academic experience and knowledge by providing them with higher quality classroom presentations, teaching them how to think textually, visually and audio-visually, and giving them opportunities to experiment, develop their technological skills, exercise their creativity, and work collaboratively.

## **Experiential Learning**

Several undergraduate English courses offer great opportunities for experiential learning, including the "Practicum in Literature, Literacies, and Language," and "The Making of Peace and War in Literatures." In Creative Writing, we have had students earning course credit through practicum units with local literary journals. Students working on *Juice* Magazine gain experience in publishing. Graduate students in Cultural Studies may work at the Winnipeg Art Gallery, the Plug-In Gallery, the Manitoba Museum, the Manitoba Archives, and local publishing companies.

We are interested in creating further opportunities for English Department faculty and students to participate in national and international exchange programs and summer institutes.

## **Program Development**

Our undergraduate students may choose to major in one of six programs: a 3-Year BA in English; a 4-Year BA in Screen and Cultural Studies, Creative Writing, or Young People's Texts and Cultures; an Honours BA in English; a BA in Interdisciplinary Linguistics. Students interested in pursuing graduate studies may enrol in our MA program in Cultural Studies. During the past 10 years, we have seen more than 100 students graduating annually.

The English Department's ongoing curricular and program reviews have been very successful. From 2011 to 2015 we've gone from 475 to 609 majors: 3yr BA - 316 to 532; 4yr BA - 28 to 44; Honours BA - 32 to 20. We anticipate that these numbers of students will continue to increase as a result of our development of the Screen and Cultural Studies specialization, and our revitalization of the Honours program.

## **Faculty Succession**

At least four English Department faculty members are, or will be, eligible to retire within the next five years. We are currently hoping to hire two tenure-track faculty in the areas of Cultural Studies and Film Studies. Thereafter, we will review our priorities for future hiring in existing as well as new areas.

## **STUDENT EXPERIENCE AND SUCCESS**

### **Retention**

In general, retention rates in upper-level English Department courses are very high. Lower retention rates in first-year courses are isolated and most often due to large class sizes (i.e. 55 to 60 students per section). This situation would be ameliorated if these sections could be capped at 40 students.

We are very concerned about the number of International students who appear to lack the support they need to succeed in English. EAL and tutoring services are vital to our International students' success. We would like to see these services become more comprehensive and more visible on campus. If we are successful at providing language, counselling, and tutoring support for students, we should see increased numbers of International students and enhanced retention. We should also see a decrease in the number of problems (such as plagiarism) involving students whose English skills are not strong enough for them to write an essay or understand assignment instructions. We would also see many more EAL students achieving success in their English courses (i.e. as distinct from passing with Ds primarily because of language barriers, not lack of conceptual ability).

### **Student Experience**

Our graduating students are equipped with writing and critical thinking skills and knowledge of historical and contemporary culture. As citizens they are prepared to participate in an educated democracy. Students with English degrees often choose careers in journalism,

public service, editing and publishing, creative writing, information technologies, education, law, medicine, and communications, or enter graduate school to prepare for an academic career in teaching and research.

English Department Scholarship contributions provide financial support for, and recognition of, undergraduate students enrolled in a variety of English courses. A total of 20 scholarships and awards are available, but their monetary value has eroded over time due to inflation and increased costs of postsecondary education. New contributions to English Department endowments are needed to provide ongoing and meaningful sponsorships for our present and future students.

### **Community Learning**

The English Department is involved in several initiatives related to community learning partnerships. In Creative Writing, we've had local writers participating in the instruction of Field Research courses. Faculty members teaching the "Practicum in Literature, Literacies, and Language" and "The Making of Peace and War in Literatures" have forged links with a variety of community organizations and set up experiential learning placements. We would like to do more in the area of community learning partnerships, and trust that the appointment of an Experiential Learning Coordinator will facilitate our efforts.

Individual faculty members often contribute to publications, including the Winnipeg Free Press, hold readings and book launches at McNally Robinson, make presentations at the Asper Center, and to other community organizations, and give lectures in the popular Skywalk Series at the Millennium Library.

Our Carol Shields Writer-in-Residence Program began in 2006 with a generous donation from the family of Carol Shields. Since then we have hosted ten professional writers, each for a term of three or four months. The writers give a public reading and a public lecture and are available for consultation with the public. They read and provide feedback on the creative writing of students and on the work of emerging writers in the larger community.

This program makes a significant contribution to the literary life of the city of Winnipeg, providing local writers of all ages and levels of ability with access to a professional writer who will evaluate their work, make suggestions, and provide advice about the writing life. Often, a meeting with a writer-in-residence is a dramatic step in the career of a new writer, who is encouraged to edit his or her work or to submit it for publication. The presence of a Writer-in-Residence enriches our Creative Writing program. It is a very important recruiting tool: across Canada, universities with strong Arts programs offer residencies to writers of national and international prestige, and we can remain competitive on that scale – with additional funding urgently needed to keep the program alive and flourishing. Unfortunately, this year's Writer-in-Residence, Rick Chafe, will be with us for only six weeks because we have run out of money.

## **INDIGENIZATION**

During the past 30 years, English Department faculty have introduced and developed the coverage of Indigenous literary and cultural material in their first-year as well as upper-level courses, including courses on Canadian and American Literatures and Cultures. For over 10 years, we have offered several courses on Indigenous Literatures and Cultures as well as courses designed for students enrolled in the Education Faculty's WEC and CATEP Access programs.

This year, we introduced an Indigenous course requirement for all English Majors and Honours students effective in September 2016, and we are pleased that the University has now approved this requirement for all students.

## **RESEARCH EXCELLENCE AND KNOWLEDGE MOBILIZATION**

English Department faculty members are highly successful in competing for internal and external research funding, publishing their scholarly articles and creative work, and delivering papers on their research at national and international conferences.

### **Support for Research**

The University's unchanging levels of financial support for individual and collaborative research programs often result in faculty members' subsidization of their own professional activities. Travel, Discretionary, and Major Research Grants should be at least double their current value. Research funding should also be extended to support faculty members' participation in workshops, seminars, and training programs related to teaching and curriculum development. Increased financial support for research will be especially important in attracting new and retaining current faculty members.

The University's Library resources must be improved in support of ongoing faculty research programs as well as undergraduate and graduate students' projects. We need increased access to major data bases, a sustainable protocol for ordering books, journals, and multimedia materials, and improved liaison with subject area Librarians. We are also interested in programming public events in collaboration with the Library.

### **Research Collaboration and Knowledge Mobilization**

English Department faculty members have established tangible and intangible research connections with scholarly networks and research groups worldwide. Each year, they give literally dozens of peer-reviewed conference papers, invited addresses, and presentations at colloquia, symposia and speaker series; in fact, they've done so on every continent except Antarctica.

CRYTC is an internationally known research centre in the field of young people's texts and cultures, housing and editing the journal *Jeunesse*, fostering collaborative research, organizing conferences, and hosting visiting scholars from international locations, including

Australia, Japan, and Saudi Arabia. Its Faculty members include: Naomi Hamer, Heather Snell, Catherine Tosenberger, and Doris Wolf (Director).

In addition to the global scope and scale of their work, English Department members maintain and cultivate concrete connections within the local community and other UW Departments and Programs.

### **Student Opportunities**

Many 3<sup>rd</sup>- and 4<sup>th</sup>-year English students serve as paid markers and research assistants for individual faculty members; moreover, graduate students in the MA in Cultural Studies program are research and teaching assistants whose close work with faculty members is part of their professionalization.

*Juice*, the UW's annual journal of creative writing by UW students, founded in 2000, is a valuable asset to literary life on campus and an integral part of our Creative Writing program. With guidance from English faculty members, and support from a community board of writers, editors, and publishers, students gain training in all aspects of publishing: editorial content, layout, cover design, printing, distribution, promotion, and bookkeeping for a literary journal. They also gain experience as organizers, readers and performers at the annual launch. Over the years, innovative students have hosted additional literary readings and open mic events, organized workshops for emerging writers, distributed the journal to high schools as a recruitment tool for the UW, and exchanged journals with other student editors across the country. In short, *Juice* provides professional work experience for our future writers, editors, and publishers.

### **CONCLUSION**

The English Department is proud of its pedagogical, curricular and scholarly work and committed to deepening and broadening our contributions by participating in the University's integrated academic and research planning process of reflection and rejuvenation.