UTQAP Cyclical Review: Final Assessment Report and Implementation Plan

1 Review Summary

Programs Reviewed:	English, B.A. Hons Specialist, Major, Minor Asian Literatures and Cultures, Minor (joint with National University of Singapore) English in the Field of Creative Writing, M.A. C.R.W. English, M.A., Ph.D.
Unit Reviewed:	Department of English
Commissioning Officer:	Dean, Faculty of Arts and Science
Reviewers (Name, Affiliation):	 Professor Stephen M. Fallon, Department of English, University of Notre Dame Professor Jan Plug, Department of English, University of Western Ontario Professor Peter Sabor, Department of English, McGill University
Date of Review Visit:	November 29-30, 2018
Date presented to AP&P	October 30, 2019

Previous Review

Date: January 9-10, 2008

Summary of Findings and Recommendations

1. Undergraduate Programs

The reviewers observed the following strengths:

• Recent redesign of undergraduate programs has been positive

The reviewers identified the following areas of concern:

 Significant undergraduate enrolment increases putting pressure on the department, potentially impacting quality of instruction and faculty morale

The reviewers made the following recommendations:

• Cap enrolment at current level until faculty complement increases

2. Graduate Programs

The reviewers observed the following strengths:

- New MA CRW extremely successful in terms of leadership, enrolment, curriculum, mentorship, internships and financial support
- PhD program thriving due to faculty dedication and diversity of expertise, strong course offerings and rich archives

The reviewers identified the following areas of concern:

- Research MA "in less satisfactory shape", due in large part to increased enrolment; student quality and credentials are very uneven
- Low rate of PhD graduate employment in tenure track positions

The reviewers made the following recommendations:

- Decrease enrolment in research MA and consider appropriate ratio of MA to PhD students in graduate seminars
- Improve placement efforts in academic jobs for PhD graduates
- Work with FAS to improve financial aid packages for doctoral students

Faculty/Research

The reviewers observed the following strengths:

- Extremely strong and dedicated faculty; many are leaders in their areas of expertise
- Strong research culture with a balance of faculty working in traditional and emerging fields

The reviewers made the following recommendations:

• Engage in more communal discussion of important departmental matters

Administration

The reviewers observed the following strengths:

- Department working well despite staffing constraints
- Excellent and committed administrative and support staff
- Departing Chair's leadership has been tremendous

The reviewers identified the following areas of concern:

English relations across the three campuses noted as a concern

The reviewers made the following recommendations:

- Consolidate tri-campus English into a "more organic, cross-communicating unit"; upcoming move to Jackman Humanities building expected to aid with establishing a cohesive graduate department
- Departure of Chair, approaching faculty retirements, recent hirings and impending move to a new building place Department at a "critical juncture";

- reviewers note that more democratic decision making and inclusive governance structures could prove beneficial
- Improve funding for computers and technological support, to reflect increased size of the Department

Last OCGS review(s) date(s): 2004

Current Review: Documentation and Consultation

Documentation Provided to Reviewers

Terms of reference; Self-study and Appendices; Previous OCGS review report including administrative response; Access to all course descriptions; Standardized data set; Calendar entry; Faculty CVs.

Consultation Process

Reviewers met with the Dean, Faculty of Arts & Science; Vice-Dean, Academic Planning and Strategic Initiatives; Chair, Department of English; Tri-campus English Department Chairs; Past and current Associate Chairs, Undergraduate and Graduate; Department Faculty; Undergraduate and graduate students; Administrative staff; Principal, University College; Principal, St. Michael's College; Representatives from cognate units: Philosophy; Centre for Medieval Studies; Sexual Diversity Studies; Cinema Studies; Spanish and Portuguese.

Current Review: Findings and Recommendations

1. Undergraduate Program

Unless otherwise noted, all bulleted comments apply to all programs reviewed.

The reviewers observed the following **strengths**:

- Overall quality
 - Engaged and enthusiastic students, who appreciate accessibility of faculty outside of the classroom
 - Department's approaches ensure the quality and coherence of its programs and courses
 - Students among the best in Canada and are getting a world-class education
- Objectives
 - Skills in critical thinking, analysis and communication that students acquire will serve them well in whatever type of work they pursue following graduation
- Admissions requirements
 - Specialist entrance requirements are rigorous but not excessive, in keeping with Department's commitment to increasing enrolment

- Curriculum and program delivery
 - Addition of required Indigenous, postcolonial or transnational literature course in the Specialist and Major a welcome development
 - Learning methods are entirely appropriate and in keeping with those of other top departments of English
 - Recent restructuring resulted in rigorous and comprehensive requirements, but also increased flexibility course selection
 - Course offerings in subjects such as English literature and Chinese translation, and literature and the sciences have the potential for increasing enrolments by appealing to students who might not be predisposed to take courses in literature
- Assessment of learning
 - Students are primarily assessed via written assignments, though there are opportunities for other manners of assessment in smaller high level courses
- Student engagement, experience and program support services
 - Students are ensured a rich and varied intellectual experience, and rate their overall academic experience very highly

The reviewers identified the following **areas of concern**:

- Admissions requirements
 - Significant concern about declining enrolments, though this is common in humanities departments across North America
 - Department now drawing from a smaller pool of candidates and experiencing difficulty recruiting students

The reviewers made the following **recommendations**:

- Overall quality
 - Continue to address declining enrolment and the need to maintain high quality programs and graduates by modifying program requirements; monitor newly implemented changes and prioritize promoting the changes as a positive improvement
- Curriculum and program delivery
 - o Consider expanding Creative Writing and Digital Humanities offerings
 - Raise caps in popular courses to encourage more students to partake of the Department's offerings, and potentially increase program enrolment
 - Provide more descriptive titles for course offerings, to accurately reflect how compelling the material is
 - Consider the viability of the program in Asian Literatures and Cultures (joint with National University of Singapore) given its small size

2. Graduate Program

Unless otherwise noted, all bulleted comments apply to all programs reviewed.

The reviewers observed the following **strengths**:

- Overall quality
 - o PhD is Canada's leading doctoral program in English
 - MACRW program is "one of the very best in North America, with a truly extraordinary recruitment record and equally impressive evidence of student success"
- Admissions requirements
 - Doctoral admission requirements are appropriately rigorous, in light of declining applications that reflect the "more straitened academic job market"
 - Department remains highly selective and is clearly attracting very strong doctoral students
 - MACRW program is small and highly selective, accepting 8-10 applicants each year, with an admissions rate under 20%
- Curriculum and program delivery
 - o PhD curriculum is well-conceived, with students encouraged both to attain competence in their subfields and improve breadth across the discipline
- Innovation
 - MACRW has an excellent mentorship program that pairs each student with an accomplished Toronto writer
 - PhD students have unique opportunities to develop skills in organizing conferences
- Student engagement, experience and program support services
 - Graduate students express strong satisfaction with their training and the overall quality of the department
- Quality indicators graduate students
 - o High number of refereed PhD student publications in leading journals
 - Graduates of MACRW have compiled an impressive record of publications and awards
- Quality indicators alumni
 - Extraordinary success placing PhD students in tenure-track positions

The reviewers identified the following areas of concern:

- Overall quality
 - Concern over quality of MA-research students because they are not funded by the University; top applicants may ultimately choose other institutions offering better packages.
- Curriculum and program delivery
 - MA-research students unenthusiastic about required "Critical Topographies" course, which is thought to be too large
- Quality indicators graduate students

- Mean time to degree rose from 6.1 years in 2008, to 7.5 in 2016
- Quality indicators alumni
 - Increasing competitiveness for faculty positions
- Student funding
 - Endowed funding for CRW program expires in 2022
 - International students do not qualify for most available scholarships, making it difficult to admit them to the CRW program

The reviewers made the following recommendations:

- Objectives
 - Consider positioning the MA program to prepare graduates for a transition into the professional world, pursuing opportunities in practical writing, grant writing for non-profits, law and literature and emerging employment areas
- Admissions requirements
 - Consider optimal cohort size of incoming PhD students
- Curriculum and program delivery
 - Reconsider requirement of "Critical Topographies" course in research MA program; making it elective could result in increased participant engagement and enthusiasm, and a more appropriate class size
- Innovation
 - Provide undergraduate teaching opportunities for advanced PhD students; this is the norm in the best graduate programs and would make U of T students more competitive with those from peer institutions, when applying for academic jobs
- Quality indicators graduate students
 - Remove comprehensive exam requirement (which has already occurred) to hopefully improve time to degree
- Student funding
 - o Prioritize funding of research MA to help attract top students
 - Secure funding for CRW program to ensure it continues to thrive

3. Faculty/Research

The reviewers observed the following **strengths**:

- Overall quality
 - "No department of English in Canada possesses faculty comparable in distinction to that of the University of Toronto"
 - Department has maintained the high level of research and teaching excellence that has long earned it a reputation as one of the premier English Departments in the world
 - Graduate Department is one of the world's largest, with an extraordinary scope of research and particular strengths across the history of British, Canadian and

American literature, as well as leading expertise in Medieval and Early Modern literature

Research

- Extremely impressive faculty research and publication record, matched only by other top schools worldwide (Harvard, Yale, Oxford, Cambridge)
- Graduate faculty employment of student research assistants is valuable for both faculty and students

Faculty

- Significant retirements (30 in past 10 years) have allowed Department to replenish its faculty complement with accomplished younger scholars
- With numerous hires in recent years, the department has reached gender parity, and the faculty is increasingly diverse; gender equity in administrative positions is also strong
- Two hires this year will add to and diversify the Department's particular strength in Shakespeare and Milton scholarship

The reviewers identified the following areas of concern:

- Faculty
 - o Recent loss of leading scholars in African and South-East Asian studies
 - Discussion of faculty job descriptions/postings less inclusive at UTSG

The reviewers made the following **recommendations**:

- Faculty
 - Prioritize hiring experts in Victorian poetry, African and South-East Asian studies,
 Global Anglophone literature and a second Indigenous Studies scholar
 - Continue to diversify faculty complement and curriculum; prioritize finding replacements for recent departures in the areas of world/transnational literature
 - Make job posting discussions more transparent

4. Administration

The reviewers observed the following **strengths**:

- Relationships
 - Extremely high departmental morale
 - Faculty express pride in the department, appreciation and support for its leadership and enthusiasm for the high quality of doctoral and undergraduate students
 - Excellent relationships with other units and colleges (in particular the Centres for Medieval Studies and Sexual Diversity Studies and the Cinema Studies Institute)
 - Open communication and collaboration across the three campuses

- Department makes significant contributions to the intellectual life of Toronto,
 Canada and the wider world, with extensive academic lectures, conference
 presentations and community outreach
- Organizational and financial structure
 - Department has strong and effective leadership in all of its administrative positions
 - Innovations such as the establishment of an endowment for MA student funding are commendable
 - Appointment of Advancement Liaison Officer a positive step towards enhancing fundraising efforts
 - Department's move to the Jackman Humanities building has been overall beneficial, bringing the tri-Campus graduate Department together
- Long-range planning and overall assessment
 - Department aware of the considerable challenges it faces, both particular to the University, and common to humanities departments across North America, and is taking necessary steps to address these
 - Department is responding to decline in undergraduate enrolment and graduate applications in a manner consistent with its academic mission
 - Declining enrolments have allowed department to move away from reliance on contract faculty to deliver courses
- International comparators
 - Department is well-positioned among the very finest worldwide, such as Yale, Harvard, Stanford, Oxford or Cambridge
 - PhD program is exceptional internationally; "no other university that surpasses
 Toronto in the strength of it doctoral program, while very few can aspire to
 match it"

The reviewers identified the following **areas of concern**:

- Organizational and financial structure
 - Department's move to Jackman Humanities building, while generally positive, has had some issues; faculty express concern about the loss of communal space for interaction with colleagues and students

The reviewers made the following **recommendations**:

- Relationships
 - Explore collaborations with other programs (i.e. Book and Media Studies) and departments
 - Leverage connections with colleges and other units to ensure that the Department's offerings are widely publicized
 - Continue current practice of open, regular communication and collaboration between tri-campus English faculty
- Organizational and financial structure

- Continue to provide office space and mailboxes on the St. George campus for faculty from UTM and UTSC
- Establish dedicated departmental teaching space, and an undergraduate lounge in the Jackman Humanities Building to foster a sense of community
- Explore possibility of selecting a future Director of Graduate Studies from UTM or UTSC, given the strong culture of tri-campus collaboration
- Invest in speakers, events and conference travel at the Faculty level; an adequate operational budget will be essential towards addressing declining enrolments and attracting top graduate students
- Long-range planning and overall assessment
 - Consider optimal size of entering PhD cohort, in light of declining academic job availability in English

2 Administrative Response & Implementation Plan



September 25, 2019

Professor Susan McCahan Vice-Provost, Academic Programs University of Toronto

Re: UTQAP cyclical review of the Department of English

Dear Professor McCahan,

Along with the faculty, staff and students of the Department of English, I am pleased with the external reviewers' assessment of the Department and its programs: B.A., Hons., English (Specialist, Major, Minor); Asian Literatures and Cultures (Minor); MA CRW, English in the Field of Creative Writing; M.A., Ph.D, English. The reviewers noted that "Department morale is remarkably high" and complimented the Department on being "one of the premier English Departments not only in North America but in the world."

The quality of this program notwithstanding, as per your letter dated July 31, 2019, the review report raises a number of issues and challenges. I am writing to address the areas of the review report that you identify as key. The response to these items and implementation plan are separated into immediate (six months), medium (one to two years), and longer (three to five years) terms, where appropriate, along with who will take the lead in each area. The Dean's office has discussed the reviewers' comments through consultation with the Chair of the Department of English to develop the following implementation plan incorporating the reviewers' recommendations.

The reviewers noted the trend in declining enrolments over the past six years, though they noted that this is common in the humanities. The reviewers encouraged the department to monitor newly implemented changes and to make promoting the changes as a positive improvement a top priority.

Immediate to longer term: Both the Dean and the Department of English acknowledge the challenges associated with declining enrollments. The Faculty will be working to address the issue of the decline in enrolments in the humanities in the 2020-2025 Academic Plan. As part of the planning process, the Dean commissioned a working group on *Leveraging Our Strengths as a Faculty of Arts and Science*, which met throughout spring 2019. Recommendations include optimizing academic advising to increase student awareness of multiple pathways to cultivating skills, developing a working group to examine how digital studies can be leveraged in the disciplines outside of computer science per se, including in English, and enhancing interactions across sectors to better link shared issues across the humanities, social sciences, and sciences. The Working Group report has been presented to the Academic Plan Advisory Committee.

Immediate term: At the unit level, the Department is taking several steps to stabilize and potentially grow student engagement in their programs and course offerings. For example, the Department has doubled the capacity in two popular courses and added a new course, with the aim of attracting more students to English POSts. Having recently completed renovation of an undergraduate student lounge in the Jackman Humanities Building, it is anticipated that this space will further enhance student experience in the near term.

Medium to longer term: The Department also plans to expand their commitment to the Digital Humanities minor, and has identified digital humanities instruction as part of their complement planning vision. Outreach will also be expanded, with the Department growing their Visitor's Day initiative to engage high school students in the discipline. Finally, the Department will develop closer ties to student organizations by dedicating four faculty to work with the English Students' Union. The Faculty of Arts & Science (FAS) expects that the curricular changes currently being implemented in English, along with their outreach activities, dedicated faculty interaction with the undergraduate student union, and the recent completion of a new undergraduate lounge, with renovations funded by FAS, will foster improved student experience to retain enthusiastic and engaged students in English programs and courses.

The reviewers encouraged diversifying the undergraduate curriculum, noting that many courses have generic "Special topics in" titles. They also encouraged expanding undergraduate creative writing and digital humanities options.

Medium term: The English Department recognizes that generic titles can unintentionally mask the extraordinary diversity of academic subjects covered in "Special topics in" courses. The Department will explore suitable alternative titles and initiate the changes through curriculum governance.

The reviewers encouraged the Department to explore collaborations with other programs (like Book and Media Studies) and departments.

Medium term: The Department already engages in multiple collaborations with other units' programs, and will explore the possibility of initiating additional connections with others that may provide fruitful possible collaborations, including those suggested by the reviewers.

The reviewers expressed concern about the increasing time-to-completion for PhD students. They noted that removing the comprehensive exam requirement (which has already taken place) will hopefully improve time to degree.

Immediate term: The Department acknowledges the issue of time-to-completion for PhD students, and has already implemented steps aimed to improve the time to graduation. Specifically, the Department has adjusted the exam requirements to replace the comprehensive exams with a modified version of special fields exams. These changes have passed through governance for implementation and became effective September 2019.

Immediate to medium term: FAS will continue to encourage the Department to accompany these changes with informational workshops for graduate students to explain the new process. FAS contributes support for unit-level initiatives for graduate mentoring and progress through its Milestones and Pathways Program, as well as writing and career exploration workshops to help graduate students navigate their academic trajectory. FAS and the Department will continue to track PhD time-to-completion to review the influence of the exam changes and other program updates.

The reviewers expressed concern that the academic job market is becoming increasingly more competitive for graduates and, given the emphasis on teaching experience for faculty positions, they encouraged the department to allow advanced PhD students to be the instructor of record for an undergraduate literature course. They also encouraged the department to consider the optimal cohort size of incoming PhD students.

Immediate term: Recognizing the changes in graduate applications, the Department has reduced its intake of new PhD students this year. As the period of intentional graduate expansion is ending, FAS will encourage units to emphasize excellence of candidates in admission to help align admission cohorts with demand and capacity.

Medium to long term: The Department currently provides PhD students with teaching opportunities, especially in summer courses. Expanding teaching opportunities for graduate students, however, is necessarily constrained by undergraduate enrollments for course offerings. As the Department works toward stability in undergraduate enrollments over the medium to long term, it will continue to review the potential to offer a subset of PhD students the opportunity to teach in courses as instructor of record.

To ensure recruitment of consistently high quality students and the quality of student experience in graduate seminars, the reviewers recommended that "every effort be made" to fund MA students.

Immediate term: Funding of MA students was a concern raised by the Department of English in their self-study, as well as by the reviewer report. Fortunately, the near-term funding situation for MA students has improved since the self-study was prepared, due to a combination of the Department admitting fewer students and through their success in securing SSHRC CGS support for students. The Department also established a graduate scholarship fund from various donors to help fund MA students. Most new domestic MA students will now receive full or partial financial support from these sources. Arts and Science also has continued to enhance its base funding package for graduate students. The Department will continue to identify new, and grow existing, sources of financial support for MA students and to balance intake of new MA students accordingly.

The reviewers underscored the importance of addressing the challenges around funding for the creative writing field to support the recruitment of strong Canadian and international students and ensure that the program continues to thrive. **Long term**: The Department shares the reviewers' concern over funding for students in the Creative Writing MA program (MA CRW) in the long term, and is in the process of internal deliberations on possible strategies to pursue prior to the expiration in five years of the current funding mechanism for the MA CRW. However, funding of MA CRW students is not currently an issue, given existing funds.

The reviewers observed that the move to the Jackman Humanities Building, including the provision of office space and mailboxes for graduate faculty for UTM and UTSC, has been beneficial, and made a number of recommendations to further support a strong sense of community through the provision of teaching and gathering space for faculty and students.

Immediate to medium term: FAS funded renovations to create a new undergraduate student lounge in the Jackman Humanities Building (JHB), which are now complete, with furniture scheduled for installation September 2019. As this upgraded space gets used by students, it will serve as a valuable point for growing their sense of community. The Department will continue to use the JHB to foster its community of English scholars, both at the faculty and student levels.

The Faculty of Arts and Science has identified space as one of its key academic priorities. The Vice-Dean, Research and Infrastructure, is currently planning a space review of the entire JHB, which houses English. The review, planned for 2019-20, may identify additional options for the Department, if other spaces can be freed up; realistically, however, there is unlikely to be additional space in the JHB until the new building at 90 Queen's Park is complete, and some units move to this new space. FAS will consider proposals by the Department of English for maximizing space within JHB for use by English and other units.

Long term: The Faculty is actively pursuing a long-term space and infrastructure plan which, over time, will significantly improve space available to Arts and Science units, including English.

The reviewers noted the recent loss of leading scholars in African and South-East Asian studies, and they emphasized the desirability of hiring in these areas and in Victorian poetry and Indigenous Studies. They encouraged a more open process for faculty hiring in the St. George department.

Medium to long term: The Department of English has internally identified several priority areas for faculty complement planning in the future. FAS is in the process of developing a unit-level academic planning template to assist units including English in articulating their 5-year vision, which includes faculty complement planning.

As the Department of English proposes complement planning positions, FAS will consider any proposals for new faculty hiring through its standard process via the FAS Appointments Committee. The Department has acknowledged a willingness to formalize early-stage procedures in faculty hiring internally to ensure a sense of collegiality among current faculty in the process. Units submit requests in March of each year for consideration by the Faculty Appointments Committee, which includes faculty representatives from across the three FAS sectors (the Humanities, Social Sciences, and Sciences) as well as the Colleges. After considering the full range of requests, the FAC makes recommendations to the Dean. Any request for additional

faculty has an impact across the division, and as such, faculty appointments are considered not in isolation, but with respect to needs that exist across the Faculty.

Over the longer term, the Department will continue to review their complement planning goals in light of student enrollments and subjects warranting greater research and teaching attention. FAS will consider any proposals for new faculty hiring through its standard process via the FAS Appointments Committee as described above.

The Dean's office will monitor the implementation of recommendations, with, at minimum, a brief report to the Office of the Vice-Provost, Academic Programs, midway between the year of the review and the year of the next site visit.

The year of the next review will be **2025-26**.

To conclude, we appreciate that the external reviewers identified the Department of English's strengths and noted a few areas for development. The Department has already begun to move forward with plans to address the recommendations as presented by the reviewers.

Sincerely,

Melanie Woodin

Mwood

Dean and Professor of Cell and Systems Biology

cc.

Paul Stevens, Chair, Department of English, Faculty of Arts & Science

Poppy Lockwood, Vice-Dean, Academic Planning and Strategic Initiatives, Faculty of Arts & Science

Asher Cutter, Associate Dean, Undergraduate Issues and Academic Planning

Daniella Mallinick, Director, Academic Programs, Planning & Quality Assurance, Office of the Vice-Provost, Academic Programs

Andrea Benoit, Academic Review Officer, Office of the Dean, Faculty of Arts and Science

3 Committee on Academic Policy & Programs (AP&P) Findings

The spokesperson for the reading group reported that the summary covered the full review. The administrative response covered all main points, though the group requested additional information on whether students would be consulted in efforts to increase enrollment and diversify the undergraduate curriculum.

Vice-Dean Lockwood confirmed that the department had routinely consulted with students on initiatives in both formal and informal ways over the last two years; and would draw on existing mechanisms to engage students in the present initiatives. In addition, Vice-Dean Lockwood noted that in Fall 2018 the department had experienced an increase in enrollment which they attribute in part to the impact of previous consultations with students.

No follow-up report was requested.

4 Institutional Executive Summary

The reviewers identified the programs' strengths as its status as one of the premier English departments in the world; its engaged and enthusiastic undergraduate students, who appreciate high faculty contact despite large student demand; the successful replenishment of the faculty complement over the past ten years; the impressive research and publication of faculty and PhD students; the successes of the MA creative writing program; and the high morale of the faculty, staff, and students, who take pride in their many accomplishments. The reviewers recommended that the following issues be addressed: monitoring newly implemented changes regarding declining enrolments and prioritizing promoting these changes as a positive improvement; diversifying the undergraduate curriculum and expanding undergraduate creative writing and digital humanities options; exploring collaborations with other programs and departments; improving time-to-completion for PhD students; allowing advanced PhD students to be the instructor of record for an undergraduate literature course to improve their prospects in the competitive academic job market; considering the optimal cohort size of incoming PhD students; improving funding for MA students; addressing the challenges around funding for the creative writing field; further supporting a strong sense of community through the provision of teaching and gathering space for faculty and students; prioritizing hiring in African and South-East Asian studies, and in Victorian poetry and Indigenous Studies; and encouraging a more open process for faculty hiring in the St. George department. The Dean's Administrative Response describes the Faculty, unit and programs' responses to the reviewers' recommendations, including an implementation plan for any changes necessary as a result.

5 Monitoring and Date of Next Review

The Dean's office will monitor the implementation of recommendations through ongoing

meetings with the Chair, as well as the A&S unit-level planning process.

The Dean will provide an interim report to the Vice-Provost, Academic Programs midway between the November 29-30, 2018 site visit and the year of the next site visit on the status of the implementation plans.

The year of the next review will be 2025-26.

6 Distribution

On October 26, 2020, the Final Assessment Report and Implementation Plan was posted to the Vice-Provost, Academic Programs website and the link provided by email to the Dean of the Faculty of Arts & Science, the Secretaries to AP&P, Academic Board and Governing Council, and the Ontario Universities Council on Quality Assurance. The Dean provided the link to the Chair of the Department.