

**University of New Mexico**

**Department of English**

**Academic Program Review**

**Review Panel Report**

**May 28, 2019**

**Report Prepared by:**

**Sharon Nepstad, University of New Mexico**

**Malea Powell, Michigan State University**

**Gary Totten, University of Nevada, Las Vegas**

**Richard Utz, Georgia Institute of Technology**

## **Table of Contents**

|   |           |
|---|-----------|
| <b>Introduction to the Report</b>           | <b>3</b>  |
| <b>Teaching &amp; Learning: Curriculum</b>  | <b>3</b>  |
| <b>Teaching &amp; Learning: Assessment</b>  | <b>4</b>  |
| <b>Students</b>                             | <b>5</b>  |
| <b>Faculty</b>                              | <b>6</b>  |
| <b>Research, Scholarship, &amp; Service</b> | <b>7</b>  |
| <b>Peer Comparisons</b>                     | <b>7</b>  |
| <b>Resources &amp; Planning</b>             | <b>8</b>  |
| <b>Facilities</b>                           | <b>10</b> |
| <b>Strategic Planning</b>                   | <b>10</b> |
| <b>Overall Recommendations</b>              | <b>11</b> |

## Introduction to the Report

This report is based on the academic program review of the University of New Mexico English department by the review panel: Sharon Nepstad (internal member), Malea Powell (Michigan State University), Gary Totten (University of Nevada, Las Vegas), and Richard Utz (Georgia Institute of Technology). The site visit for this review took place during April 8-10, 2019. This report follows the format provided by the Office of Academic Affairs for the onsite report with a few modifications. The contents of the report are organized according to the following sections:

- Teaching and Learning: Curriculum
- Teaching and Learning: Assessment
- Students
- Faculty
- Research, Scholarship, & Service
- Peer Comparisons
- Resources & Planning
- Facilities
- Strategic Planning
- Overall Recommendations

## Teaching & Learning: Curriculum

### Strengths:

Undergraduate students expressed a high degree of satisfaction about their classroom experiences, faculty mentoring and accessibility, and the usefulness of courses such as grant writing, editing, and publishing. It is clear that the English department faculty are delivering a quality educational experience.

Graduate students express satisfaction with their classroom experience, faculty mentoring, and pedagogical training. They also noted that the department's job seeking workshop has been very useful and the department chair has been helpful in identifying and encouraging students to apply for various opportunities and funding sources that support professionalization experiences.

### Areas Requiring Improvements:

Although the undergraduate students overall were pleased with their educational experience, they did express a strong interest in returning to transcriptable concentrations in the major since they feel that this will be an asset on the job market. While we note that declining enrollment in undergraduate English programs may be due to national trends and the hesitancy of parents and students to concentrate their studies in the humanities, we believe that a stronger orientation toward such student career needs may soften the decline that UNM's English department is now facing.

In addition, we observed that the undergraduate curriculum is largely oriented toward faculty preference and field identity rather than student needs. There is an overlap with other units in terms of course offerings (such as Chicana/o Studies and American Studies). In a period of declining enrollments and minimal faculty hiring, we urge the department to reconsider their largely traditional curriculum. We encourage the faculty to generate creative solutions that could build off other departmental offerings and faculty expertise rather than remaining tied to a coverage model that may not be serving the students well and that may not be sustainable given the slowing pace of faculty hiring.

Graduate students were concerned that they had difficulties getting the courses they needed in a timely manner due to only a few seminars being offered each semester in each concentration. Prior to scheduling, the department may consider polling students to get input on course needs and interests. Similar to our comments about the undergraduate curriculum, we note that graduate admissions categories replicate traditionalist and narrow structures that disadvantage some areas of excellence. It may be worthwhile to reconsider this admission process of designating an allocated number of acceptances to each area in order to recruit the strongest students.

## Teaching & Learning: Assessment

### Strengths:

At the undergraduate level, there is evidence that assessment procedures are being developed, after a period of stagnation due to transitioning leadership roles. Specifically, the creative writing and literature groups are working on their assessment criteria and measures, which will be implemented by their designated Associate Chairs. The Core Writing assessment is robust and ongoing. However, while assessment of individual courses is occurring, there is currently no assessment of the overall degree (BA in English Studies).

At the graduate level, the department has developed student learning outcomes that have general support from the faculty. However, the department is still trying to refine the language and assessment measures to ensure that they are producing useful information. The Associate Chair for Graduate Studies and the members of the Graduate Committee continue to refine the assessment tools.

### Areas Requiring Improvements:

Given the department's heavy service load, it is not surprising that assessment has been given insufficient attention. However, we note that progress is being made. At the undergraduate level, an assessment plan for the degree has been approved. The Department Chair and the Associate Chair for Undergraduate Studies have begun to collect data in the Spring 2019 semester. For accreditation purposes – as well as for the department's ability to measure its successes and improve their practices – it is important that the department ensures that the plan is implemented and regularly scheduled assessments occur in the future.

Toward that goal, we recommend that the English Department appoint a single assessment coordinator who oversees all these assessment procedures. This person would collaborate with the Associate Chairs of Undergraduate and Graduate Studies to

ensure that the assessment measures are tied to national metrics. The coordinator would also be responsible for working with faculty to collect data, to analyze the results, and to present the findings to faculty to provide an opportunity for reflection and feedback. This assessment coordinator should receive a course release and, if possible, a stipend for this work.

## Students

### Strengths:

The review team members were impressed with the undergraduate English Studies majors. These students are eloquent, articulate, and self-aware; they are invested in their course of study and view the major as valuable and reputable. Some of these students initially came to UNM to study in highly popular STEM fields but were drawn to English Studies and chose to change their major.

The graduate students all receive funding, regardless of whether they are MA, MFA, or PhD students. This is unusual practice by national standards but a wonderfully constructive one. The graduate students have developed a strong peer support system and they are organized and proactive in pursuing goals such as receiving legislative funding to improve their campus office spaces. Their job placement has been quite good and graduate students are regularly publishing and presenting their work at conferences.

### Areas Requiring Improvements:

Even though the undergraduate program is strong, we propose that there are several things that the department can do to further build their enrollments and number of majors. First, we encourage the department to proactively track their alumni. This will provide information about the types of jobs and careers that UNM English graduates are working in, which will illuminate the job prospects for this major. Second, we think students' marketability will be enhanced if their transcripts indicate a concentration in a particular area (such as technical and professional writing, creative writing, literature, etc.). Therefore, we recommend that the department consider reinstating these concentrations. Finally, the review team noted that the undergraduate students do not really have a cohort experience. We encourage the department to consider ways of building and enhancing a cohort experience, which can contribute to peer mentoring, retention, and a sense of community.

Funding is the primary concern for graduate students. Graduate students spoke of earning poverty-level wages (roughly \$15,000 per year) that force many to take on additional jobs (such as washing dishes and waiting tables). This impacts the time that they have available for publishing; if they are not publishing, they will not be competitive on the academic job market. In addition, these funding packages require graduate students to teach two courses a semester (2/2 teaching load). We note that the national standard at peer institutions is for students to have a 1/1 or 1/2 teaching load. In essence, they have a faculty-level teaching load while they are trying to complete their degree. We also highlight the fact that there is insufficient funding to ensure that graduate students are able to attend national conferences. This is essential in establishing professional networks and building a competitive CV, which is essential as students enter the job market.

## Faculty

### Strengths:

The faculty are very productive despite severe resource scarcity (compared to other R1 English departments). Indeed, the department is home to many nationally prominent faculty who are engaged with students and supportive of their learning and success. The department offers foundational support of the university's strategic mission, including the Core Writing Program's mission to support underrepresented students. The majority of the faculty seem able to maintain high research/creative activity profiles while being good teachers and mentors. In addition, a core of resilience appears to exist among faculty who have endured traumatic events. A sense of camaraderie exists among various groups of faculty, particularly the junior faculty and the Rhetoric and Composition faculty. The latter group has an exciting vision for the future via a proposed Digital Media Lab.

Faculty advancement is supported by a one-semester leave for associate professors to facilitate promotion to full professor and a one-semester leave for junior faculty members prior to the third-year review. The department also is supportive of external fellowships.

### Areas Requiring Improvements:

As noted above, faculty are highly productive despite being underpaid in comparison with other R1 departments. The faculty seem isolated in area towers that do not seem productive and in some cases are damaging to curricular and scholarly innovation, sub-disciplinary and interdisciplinary collaboration (including with other departments/programs across the university), and collegiality.

The current mentoring system is inadequate, and in some cases inappropriate, and shown by research to be ineffective. Department members should attend the Mentoring Institute Conference at UNM, supported by the dean. The National Center for Faculty Develop and Diversity (<https://www.facultydiversity.org/>) also has good mentoring resources that could be consulted. Faculty retention, particularly of junior faculty, has been and will be affected unless this is addressed. In addition, all faculty should be made to feel supported and valued. Distinctions between non-tenure-track and tenure-track faculty are not clear in terms of expectations and valuing their work.

There is evidence that a small number of senior faculty are behaving in ways that are coercive and intimidating and keeping the department from moving forward. An intervention is needed by the dean as well as other senior faculty in the department to support the chair in remedying this issue.

Opportunities for faculty to work virtually instead of in residence seem to be distributed inequitably and without transparency, particularly for a department that has limited resources. Allowing some faculty to be "absent" may be well intentioned to avoid potential conflict, but it makes it difficult to adequately support graduate student mentoring in some fields and sends the wrong message to new and mid-career colleagues about engagement in department culture. It also appears that some faculty in residence choose to remain uninformed by not attending meetings or otherwise

engaging in department culture. Faculty should be encouraged to attend department meetings and stay informed.

The department should be encouraged to recruit with the goal of further diversifying the faculty. The department should take advantage of opportunities to participate in cluster and other innovative hiring initiatives (e.g., recent cluster hire in Native American studies).

## Research, Scholarship, & Service

### Strengths:

As noted earlier, research and scholarship are at high levels despite many service obligations and low compensation. Faculty across all areas are productive at an R1 level, regularly publishing their work with top presses and in top journals in their fields, presenting their work at national and international conferences, and seeking grant funding. The department houses nationally recognized programs (e.g., Creative Writing, Medieval Studies, Rhetoric and Writing, Southwest Studies) that faculty have built and been able to sustain despite inadequate compensation and heavy service loads.

### Areas Requiring Improvements:

The service load is too high in light of compensation offered for major service as directors or associate chairs of programs. Service expectations and compensation (e.g., course releases) should be regularized and simplified and made transparent to the department.

The scholarship of teaching and learning and collaborative scholarship does not seem to be valued by everyone in the department and is not in line with best practices at R1 English Departments. The department should follow recommendations by national organizations, for example those offered by the MLA for evaluating work in digital humanities (<https://www.mla.org/About-Us/Governance/Committees/Committee-Listings/Professional-Issues/Committee-on-Information-Technology/Guidelines-for-Evaluating-Work-in-Digital-Humanities-and-Digital-Media>) or by the CCC for evaluating collaboration and research in rhetoric and writing (<https://cccc.ncte.org/cccc/resources/positions/scholarshipincomp>). A number of influential colleagues may retain ideals of faculty productivity that date back to the time when literature faculty began to dominate English departments, and this approach does not adequately account for or value the diversity of faculty research and productivity in the department.

## Peer Comparisons

The department self study focused on three institutions, Arizona State (a regional competitor for the best students and faculty), UT Austin, and UC Riverside, realizing that these choices “are larger in every respect” than UNM’s English department. We do not find these choices particularly helpful, except that all three are flagship institutions in their respective states. All three universities and their English departments are not only larger, but also much better resourced. While they could serve as aspirational peers, they provide little comparative value for a realistic comprehensive evaluation.

Based on these observations, we recommend overall, for the external review process, that departments be directed to pick more than three peer comparisons and that they be asked to pick institutions at lower than peer, true peer, and aspirational peer levels. We would also like to note that a comparative peer department may sometimes be situated at an institution that is not a peer for the college or UNM as a whole.

### **Strengths:**

We note that the department has managed to sustain a record of research and teaching excellence in line with peer institutions. This is an impressive achievement, especially when one considers the low level of institutional support for research, scholarly travel, professional development, etc. Despite the lack of sufficient funding, the department is managing to attract a substantial number of productive and entrepreneurial graduate students to its programs.

### **Areas Requiring Improvements:**

We want to reiterate that the department is significantly under-resourced in comparison to peer units and institutions in terms of salary, travel, research funding, and operating budget. We are afraid it might be only a matter of three to five years until the absence of appropriate resources will have dire consequences for the quality and quantity of research-active faculty and graduate students the unit can attract and retain.

Overall, but especially in terms of curriculum and faculty specializations, the department has a more traditionalist structure than most current top tier English departments. It seems that change in the unit comes mostly incrementally (as per adding additional courses based on newly hired or tenured faculty) rather than as comprehensive and planned revisions of curricular offerings based on disciplinary developments and student need. We are aware that making tactical instead of strategic revisions may be part of a defensive mechanism as state and institutional support have seen redirections/cuts. However, many of the current departmental curricular terminologies and organizational structures feel as if they are a holdover from the early 1990s (including the move toward “English Studies” at the undergraduate degree level).

## **Resources & Planning**

Any large scale change in departmental resources and planning depends on decisions and budgeting priorities at the dean’s level or at central administration. At the dean’s level, we recommend that future decisions about hiring new faculty, as important as they are, be balanced against the need for realistic departmental operating budgets.

### **Strengths:**

We found that the department has a dedicated and highly qualified staff. Staff members feel a strong allegiance to the department’s and institution’s core objectives, and they work hard to serve students and faculty. Specifically, the department administrator is doing an outstanding job as the central managerial and communicative “node” between department chair, faculty, and staff.

The department's governance looks very solid. It includes an established board, the Executive Committee, which is advisory to the chair. The board is inclusive of all departmental ranks and kinds of appointments, and even has a graduate student representative. We believe the EC, which is the unit's only elected governance body, offers important input to the chair. The committee might consider electing its own chair instead of asking the department chair (who serves ex officio) to run the meetings. EC chair and department chair would collaborate closely in the preparation of the agenda for the meeting.

There are several praiseworthy entrepreneurial efforts at providing additional support for the department's activities, specifically via the Core Writing Textbook. Beyond this, we notice the chair's efforts to bring in external financial support for the unit, efforts particularly impressive given her overall workload.

### **Areas Requiring Improvements:**

The operations budget is abysmally small, and it disadvantages the unit in relation to peer institutions and in relation to the number of students and faculty served. These conditions seem to have been created at the dean's level almost a decade ago, at a time when hiring faculty was prioritized beyond staff and operations support. We recommend a more balanced use of resources in the future as well as the immediate rebuilding of the operations budget.

In conversations with chair, faculty leaders, and staff, we determined that the leadership team could do a better job at prioritizing and delegating. Specifically, better time management by the chair and leadership team could avoid stressful situations in regards to deadlines and other issues. We mention the preparation of the Self Study for this APR as a case in point. Better time management and the delegation of tasks could have made the finalizing of the document less stressful.

Another helpful internal change could be better communication and transparency about how decisions are made, how class schedules are determined, etc. We recommend, for example, to build multi-year plans for class rotations and teaching schedules, which would much better communicate to faculty the reasons for certain decisions. It would also avoid the impression that certain colleagues receive preferential treatment.

Communication and transparency might also assist the department with more effective management: For staff members, for example, specific job duties should be clearly delineated and communicated to everyone in the unit. Regular chair or leadership meetings with the staff would make sure that everyone is informed and thus can support specific planning goals throughout the year. Considering the high workload for the chair and staff, creating the position of an assistant chair position might be considered to assist with operations and planning in the department. Such a position could, for example, pay special attention to communicating leadership and planning decisions to the entire unit.

## Facilities

### Strengths:

As in several other areas of our review, we would like to acknowledge the chair's extraordinary attempts at creating a positive workplace atmosphere for the department. She has done everything possible (including 'hands-on' work) to make departmental/common spaces as pleasant as possible. The chair has also used available department funds appropriately and equitably to provide adequate technology to faculty.

We would also like to acknowledge graduate students' entrepreneurial attitude toward the absence of appropriate support to improve their spaces via a successful internal grant application

The Rhetoric and Writing program is working on a proposal for the Digital Media Lab. We would like to mention that there might be an opportunity to pool resources for this exciting effort with the Spanish and Portuguese Department, which houses an apparently under-utilized language lab.

### Areas Requiring Improvements:

It will not be a surprise to anyone at UNM that we believe a substantial institutional investment in facilities is necessary. We thus agree with the department's assessment in the self-study report that the building needs work, and that some specific problems need immediate attention (for example, the inaccessible restrooms). Attractive spaces with appropriate seating and equipment are among the top reasons for potential students and faculty to make UNM's English department their home. As external visitors, we cannot imagine that students or faculty would look forward to spending more time in the departmental spaces as absolutely necessary. In fact, we believe that the overall state of the facilities gives the impression of "underfunding" and the unit "being left to its own devices." Here, too, continued inattention to these issues may well result in the department losing its competitive edge. Again, this is a recruitment and retention and faculty and student productivity issue that should not be underestimated in its impact.

We also find current technology support for faculty from within the department insufficient and problematic. We encourage that the university and the college enhance such support or, even better, provide a comprehensive plan for faculty technology support. The department is underfunded as things are. This large budget item needs to be a priority investment for central administration.

## Strategic Planning

### Strengths:

Based on our conversations, we concluded that department leadership and faculty are aware of many of the challenges they are facing in terms of student enrollment, resource scarcity, and shifting department culture. We would encourage the department to do more to address these needs and prioritize areas that are clearly foundational. For

example, we felt that the chair and leadership are attentive to staff needs and have begun to work toward remedies.

### **Areas Requiring Improvements:**

Strategic planning, i.e., the unit's informed definition of future direction, and allocation of resources to pursue this direction, is almost impossible as long as systemic support issues and strategic planning directions are not provided at the college and provost levels. It is our impression that the department may well be trying to do too many things at the same time and should be given (and give itself) a "timeout" to focus on what is central to its identity. We realize this is very difficult when the unit is in continual survival mode. There are, however, some discussions the unit might have without external support. For example, faculty should look ahead and discuss various scenarios within which the unit might prioritize when it comes to degree programs, events, etc. Then, depending on support from central administration, they could act accordingly. If national trends are any indication, the department may not be able to sustain all activities and programs. Rather than having to react to decisions at the state government or central administration levels, it should be proactive and come up with a realistic strategy.

## **Overall Recommendations**

### **Teaching & Learning: Curriculum:**

We recommend that the traditional structure of the department and curriculum be addressed. The department could take the following steps to update its approach to the field and to meet student career needs: undertake a comparative analysis of peers, collaborate with units where there are replications of offerings (e.g., Chicana and Chicano Studies), rethink English major concentrations in a student-centered way, rethink graduate admission categories, and schedule graduate courses to meet student need and facilitate progression through the program.

### **Teaching & Learning: Assessment:**

We recommend that the department appoint a single assessment coordinator who would oversee assessment procedures and collaborate with the Associate Chairs of Undergraduate and Graduate Studies to ensure that the assessment measures are tied to national metrics. Regularly scheduled assessments should occur, and the results should be discussed as a department.

### **Students:**

We recommend that the department proactively track alumni in order to illuminate job prospects for undergraduate and graduate students. The department should consider reinstating the undergraduate concentrations and consider ways to enhance the cohort experience for majors (which will support mentoring and retention). Graduate student stipends should be increased and teaching loads decreased to be more competitive in comparison with other R1 departments. Support for graduate student professionalization (e.g., funding to attend and present at national conferences) should also be increased.

### **Faculty:**

We recommend that the department address the issue of faculty being isolated in area towers that prevent curricular and scholarly innovation, collaboration, and collegiality. The department should create a peer mentoring plan and clear expectations for success, including teaching observations, particularly for junior faculty. Tenure and promotion expectations for research, teaching, and service should be clarified in the existing documents, based on best practices at R1 institutions. The Mentoring Institute Conference at UNM and the National Center for Faculty Development and Diversity (<https://www.facultydiversity.org/>) can provide resources for this work, and the dean should support this effort with resources as needed.

More efforts should be made to understand and value the diverse contributions and characteristics of subfields to the department; these differences should be accounted for in promotion and tenure processes. The chair should receive support of the senior faculty and the dean in addressing difficult faculty dynamics, specifically to address how louder, negative, and more aggressive voices keep the department from moving forward. Faculty should be encouraged to attend department meetings and stay informed, and the department, with the dean's help, should address the issues created by faculty teaching virtually. The department should cultivate transparency in resource allocation (including course releases) and decision-making. The department should seek to further diversify its faculty.

### **Research, Scholarship, & Service:**

We recommend that the department seek to value the diversity and contributions of all faculty research, including following recommendations by national organizations such as the MLA (<https://www.mla.org/About-Us/Governance/Committees/Committee-Listings/Professional-Issues/Committee-on-Information-Technology/Guidelines-for-Evaluating-Work-in-Digital-Humanities-and-Digital-Media>) and CCC (<https://cccc.ncte.org/cccc/resources/positions/scholarshipincomp>). The department should find ways, with the dean's help, to build and sustain areas of research and creative excellence (e.g., Medieval Studies Center, Taos Writers' Conference, Digital Media Lab). These areas of strength raise the department's (and university's) national profile and allow the department to attract and retain students and faculty.

The department should find ways to more adequately compensate faculty for major service assignments. The department should have an open discussion about how to handle course releases in an innovative, equitable, and efficient way. Clear position descriptions and possible course releases should be discussed and decided on as a department.

### **Peer Comparisons:**

We recommend that the department consider models and innovations at R1 peer institutions in rethinking curriculum and departmental structure.

**Resources & Planning:**

We recommend that the department's operating budget be rebuilt in order to sustain the department's needs. The leadership team should consider prioritizing and delegating essential tasks. We recommend better communication and transparency about teaching schedules, course rotations, and decision-making overall. Job duties for staff members should also be clear and shared with everyone. The department should consider creating the position of assistant chair to assist with communication, planning, and other essential tasks.

**Facilities:**

We recommend that the college and university devote resources to the department's facilities to improve recruitment and retention. The college and university should also develop a comprehensive plan for faculty technology support so that the department does not have to use its already meager operating budget to fund this essential need.

**Strategic Planning:**

We recommend that the department focus on matters of foundational importance, such as questions of identity, program sustainability, and equity. It appears that the department might be attempting to focus on too many things at once and should be given the opportunity for a "timeout" to focus on what goals are central to its identity and purpose and then plan a realistic and proactive strategy for accomplishing these goals.